

A DIACHRONIC STUDY
OF THE CONSCIOUSNESS PROCESS (*CITTAVĪTHI*)
IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM:
ITS DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY
AND EARLY CONTEXT OF FORMATION

BRYAN DE NOTARIIS

ABSTRACT

Starting with a seminal article of Lance Cousins (1981), the present article attempts to establish a preliminary account of the history of the consciousness process (*cittavīthi*) according to a number of important primary sources. In the pursuit of outlining the stages of development of the *cittavīthi*, the relationship between the doctrine of the consciousness process and the doctrine of momentariness will be discussed, with a particular focus on some aspects of the latter. Given that this article will try to establish how the doctrine of the consciousness process developed over time, I will begin by introducing the former studies on this doctrine, highlighting several scholarly tendencies (§ 2). Thereafter, key accounts concerning the analysis of the act of seeing through the lens of the consciousness process will be analysed, differentiating between ancient and more recent accounts (§ 3; § 4; § 5). Later, the original context of development of the doctrine of the consciousness process and the concept of *citta-niyāma* will also be analysed (§ 6; § 7). Finally, there will be an attempt to make distinctions between the accounts analysed in order to establish older and younger strata, and some considerations will be advanced of the possible reasons why the basic kernel of the doctrine of consciousness process changed over time (§ 8).

This paper is a corrected and revised version of Appendix 3 of my doctoral dissertation (De Notariis 2021: 259–294), while the rest of the dissertation will be published in a revised version as a monograph (De Notariis forthcoming). I am therefore grateful to my former supervisor Prof. Alberto Pelissero; to Rupert Gethin and Michael Radich who commented on an earlier draft; to an anonymous reviewer for JIABS, for their useful remarks; to Chelsey Smith for checking and improving my English. It goes without saying that all remaining errors are my own responsibility. Translations from Pāli and Chinese are my own unless otherwise noted.

1. Introduction

In the development of Buddhist literature, the Abhidhamma reflects the need to organise the scattered teachings attributed to the Buddha and to provide an exposition of the Doctrine with a sense of unity and consistency. In the words of Rupert Gethin, this was a “second-order exercise” (2022: 227) and provided the first exegetical systematisation of the early material (Gethin 1998: 48). During this process, early harbingers of two doctrines, which will occur fully developed only later, make an appearance. These two doctrines are the doctrine of the consciousness process (Pāli: *cittavīthi* or *vīthicitta*) and the doctrine of momentariness (Pāli: *khaṇavāda*; Sanskrit: *kṣaṇavāda*).

The doctrine of momentariness concerns the idea that phenomena (Sanskrit: *saṃskṛta*, *saṃskāra*, *dharma*), which constitute both the mental and physical world, can come into being and disappear within just one moment (Pāli: *khaṇa*; Sanskrit: *kṣaṇa*). It does not concern so much the passage of time or the existence of time, but rather the construction of temporal experience (Ronkin 2010: 350). On the doctrine of momentariness there are two extensive reference works which are in some ways complementary. The first study comprises the PhD thesis of Alexander von Rospatt (1995) who predominantly analysed the textual sources of North Buddhist schools, and therefore did not provide a full account of how the doctrine took place in Theravāda texts. Nonetheless, this gap was filled by the PhD thesis of Wan Doo Kim (1999), which was recently published as a monograph (= Kim 2023), who analysed the doctrine of momentariness with its origin and development within the Theravāda tradition.¹

The doctrine of the consciousness process concerns the mind flow patterns according to specific psychophysical events. The basic assumption is that the mind will follow a specific pattern of stages according to certain stimuli and thus there is a sort of natural order (*niyāma*), an unvarying sequence of predetermined mental states conforming to a certain situation. As highlighted by Lance Cousins (1981) in a seminal

¹ From now on, I will mainly use Pāli terms when mentioning Buddhist concepts, unless otherwise noted.

article, the first signals of this doctrine are already present in some Abhidhammic works, such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Paṭṭhāna*, whereas more detailed and comprehensive presentations occur in the Pāli commentaries and late Abhidhamma manuals. These accounts have important variations which would allow an element of speculation regarding the development of such a doctrine.

Furthermore, Cousins identifies in his study some exegetical passages on the consciousness process to which he attributes a more ancient status than other more detailed and developed accounts. In this study, I therefore intend to continue this line of research, taking up and corroborating some of Cousins' observations, and analysing in greater detail the ancient commentarial evidence on the consciousness process in an attempt to establish lines of development and trace the ancient context from which this doctrine originated. In doing so, there will be the opportunity to note how some stages of the consciousness process developed, with particular reference to the *tadārammaṇa* ("registration") stage, which has already been identified by Cousins as a stage which developed later than an older central nucleus.² Furthermore, another theme which will be addressed is the relationship between the consciousness process and the doctrine of momentariness.

The elaboration of a theory that conceives the mental activity as a series of consciousness processes could seem, according to the mainstream theory, a by-product of the doctrine of momentariness as it was accepted by the Theravāda school.³ The characteristic of the changeability of the mind complies with the doctrine of momentariness, but, *how* it changes is a matter that falls within the scope of the consciousness process. Therefore, the relationship between the two doctrines will be further investigated in the present article, showing that there could be evidence to argue that some aspects of the doctrine of momentariness and the

² In this regard, see Cousins (1981: 43–44).

³ Authors that seem to suggest these kinds of interpretation are, for instance, von Rospatt (1995: 33–34; see below n. 8) and Ronkin (2010: 351–352). This idea is implicitly sustained also by Kalupahana: "The theory of moments as well as its corollaries, like the conception of *bhavaṅga* [...]" (1987: 115), being *bhavaṅga* an important stage in the consciousness process (see § 2.1). Similarly, this assumption is implicit also in Skorupski (2014: 55).

consciousness process were initially separate, prompting us to wonder in what terms the consciousness process is a by-product of the doctrine of momentariness. In so doing, this research will be a way to further elaborate on some observations already made by W. D. Kim (1999: 149 = 2023: 133), who noted that some aspects of the doctrine of momentariness often connected with the doctrine of consciousness process in later texts were not explicit in earlier sources. In particular, from an early canonical idea that material and mental phenomena do not have the same duration and that mental phenomena are shorter than material ones (e.g. S II 94–95; Kv 620), a speculation about the duration ratio of a material phenomenon compared to a mental one has been developed. The accepted ratio in Theravāda’s early post-canonical texts is that one material phenomenon lasts either sixteen or seventeen mental moments; the latter is the one adopted by the later Abhidhamma manuals such as the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* of Anuruddha. Therefore, W. D. Kim writes:

early commentarial tradition also presupposes the momentariness of each stage of the thought process [= our “consciousness process”]; however, it does not conspicuously connect the process with the sixteen moments theory (Kim 1999: 149 = 2023: 133; square brackets mine).

Kim’s observation opens an interesting interpretative possibility which, however, requires further clarification. Indeed, in *lato sensu*, mental phenomena were already conceived as arising and ceasing from moment to moment in the Abhidhamma, and the consciousness process has its harbingers precisely in the Abhidhamma, thus suggesting that a connection with the doctrine of momentariness cannot be definitively ruled out. However, in *stricto sensu*, a more evident connection of the consciousness process with the doctrine of momentariness, especially the sixteen moments theory mentioned by Kim, as we will see, appears in accounts which show a high degree of development and, in general, an overemphasis on the subdivision of the stages of the consciousness process into moments, which does not seem to be a feature present in the oldest textual stratum.

Therefore, to effectively investigate all these arguments I will approach post-canonical sources in a diachronic way in an attempt to establish the different levels of development of the consciousness process doctrine.

I will begin with a literature review emphasising the scholarly reception (or its lack) of Cousins' article (1981) and showing how some die-hard scholarly theories survived for too long, affecting academic researches on the consciousness process.

2. Literature review: scholarly reception of Cousins' article

It is clear that the theory of the consciousness process is well established in the *Paṭṭhāna* [...]

To what extent it is to be found in earlier works such as the *Vibhaṅga* remains an open question, but the theory is not a product of the commentarial stage.

(Cousins 1981: 44)

The academic literature concerning the consciousness process (*cittavīthi*) is varied and its treatment of the topic is, in a way, slightly controversial. In fact, in one of the earliest works which considers the topic of the consciousness process, a view was stated that went on to influence many later works. There is, indeed, a widespread theory which has been able to survive despite the contrasting evidence presented by scholars. This view concerns the idea that the introduction of the theory of the consciousness process in Theravāda tradition is due to Buddhaghosa. In this regard, E. R. Sarathchandra wrote in 1958:

The theory is quite unique in the history of Indian thought, and it was probably the work of Buddhaghosa who came to Ceylon after having immersed himself in Sanskrit philosophy (Sarathchandra 1958: 49).

On the other hand, it has already been suggested by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in his translation of the *Visuddhimagga* first published in 1956, how the consciousness process may have some antecedents within some Suttantas and Abhidhamma passages (Ñāṇamoli [1956] 2011: 121, n. 13).⁴ The footnote of Ñāṇamoli did not go unnoticed since Noble R. Reat clearly shows to have read it and accepted it as a valid theory (Reat 1977: 179).⁵

⁴ I should specify that the work of Sarathchandra is based on his PhD thesis published years before (viz. Sarathchandra 1948), see Jayatilleke (1963: 433, n. 1).

⁵ Although Reat does not refer directly to Ñāṇamoli's work, his formulation resembles Ñāṇamoli's exposition in a way that seems to be more than a coincidence. Ñāṇamoli first

Thereafter, another scholar, David J. Kalupahana, reiterated the view of Sarathchandra, writing that:

Some of Buddhaghosa's statements provide reasonable grounds for the hypothesis that Buddhaghosa was at least partly responsible for introducing certain metaphysical ideas into the Sinhala Buddhist tradition. Foremost among them is the theory of moments (*kṣaṇa-vāda*) which produced most of the philosophical controversies in the Buddhist tradition. This theory, according to Buddhaghosa's own testimony, was not part of the original Theravāda tradition. [...] The theory of moments as well as its corollaries, like the conception of *bhavaṅga* and *svabhāva*, were topics hotly debated by the Buddhists in India long before Buddhaghosa arrived in Sri Lanka (Kalupahana 1987: 115).⁶

The above passage is from a work published in 1987. However, Lance S. Cousins had already published his work in 1981 demonstrating that a primitive model of the consciousness process was already present within the Abhidhamma, and especially within the *Paṭṭhāna*. There is immediate reference to Cousins' work in Collins (1982: 238).⁷ In 1995, a few works were published that consider the origin of the consciousness process theory with a contradictory view. On the one hand, there is Harvey (1995: 252–258) who accepted Cousins' findings, but, on the other hand, von Rospatt (1995: 33–34) was still more inclined to believe an adoption from outside in which Buddhaghosa may have played a key role.⁸ Thereafter, it would seem that Cousins' article influenced the

wrote that "The 'cognitive series' (*citta-vīthi*) so extensively used here is unknown as such in the Piṭakas. Perhaps the seed from which it sprang may exist in, say, such passages as [...]" (Ñāṇamoli [1956] 2011: 121, n. 13). After this statement he quotes a passage from M I 111–112. It is possible to find in Reat's work the same statement but paraphrased: "[Buddhaghosa's] theories are consistent with the earlier *Piṭaka* texts, and the seeds of his *citta-vīthi* [sic] theory may be seen in such passages as [...]" (Reat 1977: 179) after this statement also Reat quotes M I 111–112.

⁶ Since in some pages before, Kalupahana (1987: 111, 112, 113) frequently mentions Sarathchandra, it seems reasonable to suppose that he derived this idea from him. Kalupahana also displays this point of view in earlier works, such as in Kalupahana (1975: 148). For a more detailed criticism of Kalupahana's bias, see W. D. Kim (1999: 245–247 = 2023: 222–225).

⁷ See also Collins (1982: 303, n. 1).

⁸ I should specify that von Rospatt does not deal directly with the consciousness process theory, but his major concern regards the doctrine of momentariness. However, from his words, it is possible to infer that he considers the consciousness process a by-product of the doctrine of momentariness: "Unlike the Sarvāstivādins and Sautrāntikas, however,

treatment of the consciousness process in some important works, such as those of W. D. Kim (1999: 98–107 = 2023: 88–96) and Ronkin (2005: 174). Karunadasa (2010: 138–151) acknowledges that the consciousness process theory is present within the Abhidhamma but claims that “it was only in the Pāli exegetical works that the idea came to be fully developed” (2010: 138). Moreover, I cannot fail to mention a relatively recent article by Ashoka Welitota entitled *Did Ācariya Buddhaghosa Formulate the Doctrine of Cognitive Process (cittavīthi)?* (2013), which claims to debate the problem revealed by the title through an unthorough use of secondary sources.⁹ Finally, there is a work by Jonardon Ganeri (2017) in which the consciousness process is included (e.g. 2017: 42–47). His approach to the literary sources intertwines with philosophy and cognitive psychology, resulting in the act of stressing the characteristic of discontinuity of the consciousness process doctrine with respect to the early canonical materials.¹⁰ So far, this literature review highlights that

the Theravādins did not give up the old conception that mental entities are briefer than material ones. They advanced the doctrine that material entities last seventeen times as long as mental entities do [...] this teaching presupposes that material entities are extremely brief and that they form series which constitute the temporally extended units which we experience in ordinary life. As such, their teaching may be considered as a peculiar form of the theory of momentariness” (1995: 33–34). Moreover, von Rospatt does not cite Cousins’ work in his final select bibliography (1995: 260). For a criticism of von Rospatt’s bias, see W. D. Kim (1999: 94, 106–107 = 2023: 85, 95–96).

⁹ The article at issue starts with the rejection of some Sarathchandra statements. Welitota quotes Sarathchandra’s work (1958) drawing material from a reprint of 2009 without mentioning the fact that he was discussing a theory older than fifty years, only using the date “2009” to refer to the work. A reader might be led to believe that he is arguing against a very recent publication. After that, he also discusses some statements of Kalupahana, further evidencing that he has only discussed dated opinions. On one occasion, he barely quotes Ñāṇamoli’s observation on the existence of allusions of the doctrine of the consciousness process within the Abhidhamma (Welitota 2013: 62). Whilst he does quote Cousins’ article (1981) twice (Welitota 2013: 65, 66, see also endnotes 41 and 47 pp. 69–70), he never mentions the main point of Cousins’ work, namely the gradual evolution of the consciousness process within the early Abhidhamma (especially in the *Paṭṭhāna*), but continues in a style which only quotes his work for rather minor points. Finally, there is no mention of other important works on the argument, such as Harvey (1995), W. D. Kim (1999), and Ronkin (2005). Welitota also clearly failed to refer to updated literature on the topic but nonetheless provides a compelling treatment of some primary sources.

¹⁰ “This second account [viz. our consciousness process] is by and large an innovation over the early Buddhist sources [...] Worried that innovation implies illegitimacy, some scholars do seek anticipations which prove that the account is ‘already implicit within the

there has not been a linear development in our advancement of knowledge on the subject, but that indeed old ideas already proved wrong continue to have space in contemporary academic discussion. This compels us to undertake considerable research on the topic moving away from some of the more outdated ideas and assumptions.

In doing so, the present article will review intensively some of the remarks made by Cousins on the development of the consciousness process, in an attempt to establish a preliminary developmental history. Cousins' work suggests that some post-canonical accounts might be particularly old, belonging directly to or even being a verbatim reproduction of the lost exegetical sources used to write the actual Pāli commentaries (e.g. 1981: 38, 43), which are the result of a redactorial moment occurring from the V century AD onward. In addition, Cousins understood the stage of *tadārammaṇa* ("registration") as a later addition (1981: 43–44), a fact which does not seem to have received due attention from scholars, perhaps because their attention was focused on other issues or other stages of the process. In fact, a new approach would also involve the consideration of the sources from different angles, given that, as argued in the coming paragraphs, there were some established tendencies and ways to approach the subject which might have influenced the current academic view on the matter.

2.1 *Prominence of bhavaṅga in the study of the consciousness process*

In connection, and in some ways in opposition, to the mind involved in process (*vīthi-citta*) there is the mind that is free of process (*vīthi-mutta*). This latter mind is said to be in an inactive mode and called *bhavaṅga*. This mind modality separates each consciousness process and is also the state that occurs in the dreamless sleep. The fact that *bhavaṅga* divides each consciousness process also implies that it is the linking element between processes. In the same way, it is also the element that connects one life to the next. At the moment of the death, the last *bhavaṅga* moment of the life of a person is a "death consciousness" (*cuti-citta*),

Canonical Abhidhamma of the Theravāda" (Ganeri 2017: 42; square brackets mine). Ganeri then provides a list of authors which includes Cousins (1981).

which is immediately followed by the first *bhavaṅga* moment of the next life called “relinking consciousness” (*paṭisandhi-citta*). Therefore, since the process of death and rebirth is explained by the Theravāda tradition through the operating mode of *bhavaṅga*, it is not surprising that it has drawn the attention of many scholars and so, among the other elements involved in the consciousness process, *bhavaṅga* is probably one of the most – if not the most – explored.¹¹

2.2 Tendencies

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a particular trend that has been affirmed among scholars. What I am referring to is the tendency to mention the consciousness process using the compound *cittavīthi*, which is scarcely attested within primary sources.¹² The use of the compound is, however, a useful tool to conventionally refer to the process that takes place in the mind when a psychophysical event happens, or to more succinctly refer to the mind that manifests itself in a processual way. Therefore, I will make use of the compound as well. Moreover, there seems to be a tendency for modern scholars to give a preeminent importance to the treatment of this doctrine as it is displayed in late systematised texts,

¹¹ The scholarship concerning a focus on the concept of *bhavaṅga* can be dated back at least to Sarathchandra (1943; 1948; 1958), who, moreover, clearly specifies in the title of his PhD thesis: “with special reference to the theory of Bhavanga” (1948). Reat (1977), when comparing the Buddhist process of rebirth with the Upaniṣadic one, dealt with the concept of *bhavaṅga*. Wijesekera (1976) tried to argue that *bhavaṅga* was already present in the early canonical material – but this view has been rejected by Cousins (1981: 45, n. 4) – and later (1979) briefly discussed *bhavaṅga* in light of the Freudian concept of “unconscious.” A reasonably long exploration was made by Collins (1982: 225–261), followed by Gethin’s seminal work (1994) a little more than a decade later. Slightly later, part of Harvey’s work (1995: 155–179) was dedicated to the concept of *bhavaṅga* with particular reference to its connection with the brightly shining mind. More recently, Bhikkhu Anālayo mentioned the concept of *bhavaṅga* in his study concerning the luminous mind (2017: 35, 42). An interesting article that deals with the term *bhavaṅga* as it occurs within the **Vimuttimaggā* was published by K. Kim (2018) and a philosophical discussion has been provided by Smith (2020). For a short Encyclopaedic entry, see Bhikkhū Dhammadinnā (2023).

¹² A search for *cittavīthi** in the digital version of Be demonstrates that the compound occurs only four times in three late texts, viz. the *Abhidhammāvatārapurāṇaṭṭikā*, the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinīṭṭikā*, and the *Paramatthavinicchaya*.

such as the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.¹³ A combination of these tendencies has been frequently reviewed. The latter in particular suggests that many accounts which present a consciousness process theory in a less orthodox way were almost ignored by academic research. The neglected treatment of such accounts would allow a further study and suggest the necessity of a more systematic analysis of the primary sources. Hence, the following attempt to understand the history of the *cittavīthi* doctrine.

3. The consciousness process in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*

I will start the exposition of the consciousness process with the developed stage achieved in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.¹⁴ Thereafter, it will be possible to analyse more ancient and less developed accounts in order to evaluate their connections with the doctrine of momentariness. The processes (*vīthi*) *par excellence* occur during sensory perception. In the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, the process which involves the five senses is called the “five-door process” (*pañcadvāravīthi*). At first, the text specifies that one mental moment consists of three (sub-)moments: arising (*uppāda*), presence (*ṭhiti*), and dissolution (*bhaṅga*) (*uppādaṭṭhiti-bhaṅgavasena khaṇattayaṃ ekacittakkhaṇaṃ nāma*; Abhidh-s 17), and that the duration of life of material phenomena is of seventeen mental phenomena (*tāni pana sattarasa cittakkhaṇāni rūpadhammānam āyu*; Abhidh-s 17). This preamble highlights the connection with the doctrine of momentariness, openly specifying the process’ subdivision of moments.

¹³ W. D. Kim (1999: 186 = 2023: 168–169) also points out that the modern works concerning the consciousness process are mostly influenced by the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*’s account.

¹⁴ Concerning the dating of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, Norman suggests that its author, i.e. Anuruddha, “lived at the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth” (1983: 151). More recently, Gethin claims that “[t]here would seem to be no *a priori* reason why the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* could not have been composed in the late sixth or early seventh century” (2007: xiv). For the purpose of the present study, it is safe to assume that the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* is later than the majority of the Pāli commentaries considered (e.g. *Visuddhimagga*, commentaries on the four principal Nikāyas, and so on).

The text goes on to explain what happens when an object comes into the range of perception of the respective sense. In order to explain this process, a visible form as an object (*rūpārammaṇa*) that enters in the range of perception of the eye (*cakkhu*) is taken as an example:

Therefore, if a visible object which has elapsed (*atītaka*) one mental moment comes in the field of perception of the eye, then the *bhavaṅga* vibrates (*calita*) twice and the *bhavaṅga*'s flow is interrupted (*vocchindivā*). Then the consciousness which adverts the five-doors (*pañcadvārāvajjanacitta*), after having arisen, ceases, adverting to the visible object. Thereafter, one immediately after the other, in a specific order, [the consciousness] arises and ceases: the eye-consciousness (*cakkhuviññāṇa*) which sees the form, the receiving-consciousness (*sampaṭicchana-citta*) which receives it, the investigating-consciousness (*santīraṇacitta*) which investigates it, the determining-consciousness (*voṭṭhapanacitta*) which determines it. Thereafter, whatever [*javana*] among the twenty-nine *javanas* of the sense-sphere obtains the conditions, impels usually seven times, and two registration (*tadārammaṇa*) resultants appropriately occur connected with the *javana*, subsequently there is the relapse into the *bhavaṅga*.¹⁵

To better understand in a practical way what happens during these stages, we shall consider the Buddhist simile of the mango fruit in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha-mahāṭīkā*:

A certain man, it seems, was sleeping at the foot of a mango tree in fruit with his head covered. When a mango fruit fell near him, he was woken by the sound. He removed the cloth from his head, opened his eyes, and saw it [i.e. the fruit]; he took it, squeezed it, smelled it, [then] knowing its ripe condition, ate it, swallowed what was in his mouth together with the saliva (*semha*),¹⁶ and then he went back to sleep right there.

¹⁵ *tasmā yadi ekacittakkaṇāṭītakam rūpārammaṇam cakkhussa āpātham āgacchati tato dvikkhattum bhavaṅge calite bhavaṅgasotaṃ vicchindivā tam eva rūpārammaṇam āvajjantaṃ pañcadvārāvajjanacittaṃ uppajjitvā nirujjhati. tato tassānantaram tam eva rūpaṃ passantaṃ cakkhuviññāṇam sampaṭicchantaṃ sampaṭicchana-cittaṃ, santīraṇamānaṃ santīraṇa-cittaṃ vavatthapentaṃ voṭṭhapanacittaṃ ceti yathākkamaṃ uppajjitvā nirujjhanti. tato paraṃ ekūṇatimsakāmāvacarajavanesu yaṃkiñci laddhapaccayaṃ yebhuyyena sattakkhattum javanaṃ javati, javanānubandhāni ca dve tadārammaṇapākāni yathārahaṃ pavattanti. tato paraṃ bhavaṅgapāto* (Abhidh-s 18).

¹⁶ Since *semha* literally means “phlegm,” I understand it in this context as “saliva,” meaning the phlegm located in the throat, just as in Wujastyk (2008: 220).

In this context, the time of sleeping is like the time of *bhavaṅga*. The time when the fruit falls down is like the time when the object strikes the sensitivity [of the physical senses]. The time of awaking through the sound is like the time of adverting (*āvajjana*). The time when he sees after having opened his eyes is like the time of the activity of the eye-consciousness (*cakkhuviññāṇa*). The time of taking [the fruit] is like the time of receiving (*sampaṭicchana*). The time of squeezing is like the time of investigating (*santīraṇa*). The time of smelling is like the time of determining (*voṭṭhapana*). The time of eating is like the time of impulsion (*javana*). The time of swallowing what is in the mouth together with the saliva is like the time of registration (*tadārammaṇa*). The time of going back to sleep is like the time of going back to the *bhavaṅga*.¹⁷

The simile illustrates the process. The state of sleeping parallels the inactive mode of the consciousness known as *bhavaṅga*, but when an object enters into the field of perception (i.e. when a fruit falls) the man awakes, interrupting the previous inactive stage; an action which parallels the stage of *āvajjana* (“adverting”). Then, the action of seeing (*dassana*), which is performed by the *cakkhuviññāṇa* (“eye’s consciousness”), occurs and it is like the man that sees the fallen fruit. However, the process is not yet complete. Three stages occur, *sampaṭicchana* (“receiving”), *santīraṇa* (“investigating”), *voṭṭhapana* (“determining”) and these stages are like taking, squeezing, and smelling the fruit: three actions which help the man to know that the fruit is ripe (and ready to be eaten). The man eats the fruit, and this is like the stage of *javana* (“impulsion”) in which there is actual enjoyment of the object. Thereafter, the man swallows the last morsels together with the saliva before going back to sleep; these actions are like the last stage of *tadārammaṇa* (“registration”) which precedes the act of going back to the inactive mode of

¹⁷ *eko kira puriso phalitambarukkhāmūle sasīsaṃ pārupitvā niddāyanto āsanne patitassa ekassa ambaphalassa saddena pabujjhitvā, sīsato vatthaṃ apantvā, cakkhum ummīletvā, disvā, ca taṃ gahetvā, madditvā, upasiṅghitvā, pakkabhāvaṃ ñatvā, paribhuñjitvā, mukhagataṃ saha semhena ajjhoharitvā, puna tatth’ eva niddāyati.*

tattha purisassa niddāyanakālo viya bhavaṅgakālo. phalassa patitakālo viya ārammaṇassa pasādaghaṭṭanakālo. tassa saddena pabujjhanakālo viya āvajjanakālo. ummīletvā olokitaṅkālo viya cakkhuviññāṇappavattikālo. gahitakālo viya sampaṭicchanaṅkālo. maddanaṅkālo viya santīraṇakālo. upasiṅghanaṅkālo viya voṭṭhapanakālo. paribhogakālo viya javanaṅkālo. mukhagataṃ saha semhena ajjhoharanaṅkālo viya tadārammaṇakālo. puna niddāyanakālo viya puna bhavaṅgakālo (Abhidh-s-mh 110–111). Cf. an old version of this account without *tadārammaṇa* at As 270–271.

bhavaṅga. This explanation, together with the preamble, could be represented by the following figure:

1 unit of material phenomenon																		
17 thought moments																		
...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	...
<i>bhavaṅga</i>	<i>atīta bhavaṅga</i>	<i>bhavaṅga calana</i>	<i>bhavaṅga upaccheda</i>	<i>pañcadvārāvajjana</i>	<i>cakkhuviññāna</i>	<i>sampaṭicchana</i>	<i>saṁtīraṇa</i>	<i>voṭṭhapana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>tadārammaṇa</i>	<i>tadārammaṇa</i>	<i>bhavaṅga</i>

Keys

- ^ = arising (*uppāda*)
 † = presence (*thiti*)
 v = dissolution (*bhaṅga*)

Figure 1. Consciousness process in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.

This explanation is valid for the objects which are extremely great (*atimahanta*), whereas a shorter and incomplete process is involved in the case of great (*mahanta*) objects, and even increasingly shorter in the cases of slight (*paritta*) and extremely slight (*atiparitta*) ones (*Abhidh-s* 18).

4. The consciousness process in the *Visuddhimagga*

A similar but slightly different exposition was already present within the *Visuddhimagga* and the same processes appear within chapter XIV called *Khandhaniddesa* in the section entitled *Viññāṇakkhandha*. In this section (*Vism* 452–460) the same consciousness process is considered but in a lengthier exposition. Another similar but slightly different exposition occurs in *Vism* 617–618. It is possible to find more or less the same mental stages which later appear in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. In both accounts, there occurs a subdivision of the process in moments, highlighting the connection with the doctrine of momentariness. A comparison of the processes with the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*'s one can be summarised as follows:

Table 1. A comparison between the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and *Visuddhimagga*. The moments that constitute each stage are reported in brackets. When in Vism 617–618 the maximum number of moments results to be ≥ 15 , it does not mean that we should consider the process composed of only 15 moments, but that this is the number of moments that we can infer from the account and then we can state that the moments are at least 15, but potentially more than that.

<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i> 18	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> 452–460	<i>Visuddhimagga</i> 617–618
<i>atīta bhavaṅga</i> (1)	–	–
<i>bhavaṅga calana</i> (1)	<i>bhavaṅgacalana</i> (1) (Vism 458)	<i>dvikkhattum bhavaṅga uppañjitvā nirujjhati</i> (2)
<i>bhavaṅga upaccheda</i> (1)	<i>niruddhe bhavaṅge/ vicchindamānā</i> (1) (Vism 458)	
<i>pañcadvārāvajjana</i> (1)	<i>āvajjanakicca</i> (1)	<i>āvajjanakicca</i> (1)
<i>cakkhuvīññāṇa</i> (1)	<i>cakkhuvīññāṇa</i> (1)	<i>cakkhuvīññāṇa</i> (1)
<i>sampāṭicchana</i> (1)	<i>sampāṭicchamānā</i> (1)	<i>sampāṭicchamānā</i> (1)
<i>santīraṇa</i> (1)	<i>santīrayamānā/santīraṇa</i> (1) (Vism 459)	<i>santīrayamānā</i> (1)
<i>voṭṭhapana</i> (1)	<i>vavatthāpayamānā/ voṭṭhapana</i> (1)	<i>vavatthāpayamānā</i> (1)
<i>javana</i> (7)	<i>javana</i> (6 or 7)	<i>pañca satta vā javanāni</i> (5 or 7)
<i>tadārammaṇa</i> (2)	<i>tadārammaṇa</i> (1 or 2) (Vism 459–460)	<i>tadārammaṇa</i> (the number is not specified; however, it is worth noting the use of singular)
Total maximum number of moments: 17	Total maximum number of moments: 16	Total maximum number of moments: ≥ 15

In these examples, the connection of the late *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*'s systematisation with some of the *Visuddhimagga*'s expositions of the process is evident, despite the existence of some differences (sometimes slightly different terminology is used and there is not a complete agreement on the exact number of occurrences of some stages). According to W. D. Kim (1999: 151, see also note 333 = 2023: 136 see also note 337),

the process explained in Vism 452–460 is not different from the exposition available in the *Atthasālinī* (261–288; see especially 269–270). However, in the *Visuddhimagga*, there is an account of the consciousness process which presents some significant differences when compared with the later *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*'s systematisation and the other *Visuddhimagga*'s expositions. Furthermore it is also, remarkably, the first time that the consciousness process is reported within the text.

The first occurrence of the consciousness process within the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 21–22) can be found in the chapter concerning morality (*sīlaniddesa*). The context regards the restraint of the senses (*indriya-saṃvarasīla*) and takes the opportunity to explain how the sensory perception occurs. The sensory perception, such as the action of seeing, is the result of an interaction between the sensory organ and the mind, which is justified by a quotation from the Ancients (*porāṇa*):

But the Ancients said: “The eye does not see the form, because it is without mind (*acittakattā*), the mind does not see [the form], because it is without eye (*acakkhukattā*); but when there is the coming together of the door and object, he sees by means of the consciousness which has the eye-sensitivity as basis.”¹⁸

This account presents fewer elements compared to the full process of perception expounded by the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, and its main focus is to note in which part of the process the non-restraint (*asaṃvara*) may arise:

In this context, there is nothing about restraint (*saṃvara*) or non-restraint (*asaṃvara*) in the eye-faculty since, depending upon the eye sensitivity, neither mindfulness nor forgetfulness arises. Furthermore, when a visible object comes in the field of perception of the eye, then when the *bhavaṅga* arises and ceases twice, the functional mind element (*kiriyāmanodhātu*)¹⁹ performing the function of adverting (*āvajjanakicca*) arises and ceases.

¹⁸ *porāṇa pan' āhu: cakkhu rūpaṃ na passati acittakattā, cittaṃ na passati acakkhukattā; dvārāmmaṇasanghaṭṭe pana cakkhu-pasādavatthukena cittena passati* (Vism 20). See also Karunadasa (2010: 147–148), who discusses the same passage with reference to the issue of the “agent” or “instrument” of perception.

¹⁹ According to the *Abhidhamma*, the mind element (*manodhātu*) is undetermined (*avyākata*) and kammically neutral and, therefore, is designed as a mere “functional” (*kiriyā*) element: *katame dhammā avyākata? yasmim samaye manodhātu uppannā hoti kiriyā neva kusalā nākusalā na ca kammavipākā* (Dhs 120 = Vibh 182, 302); *ye ca dhammā kiriyā neva kusalā nākusalā na ca kammavipākā* (Dhs 181 = Vibh 106).

Thereafter, the eye-consciousness (*cakkhuviññāṇa*) performing the function of seeing (*dassanakicca*), the resultant mind element (*vipākamanodhātu*) performing the function of receiving (*sampaṭicchanakicca*), the resultant causeless discriminatory mind element (*vipākāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu*) performing the function of investigating (*santīraṇakicca*), the functional causeless discriminatory mind element (*kiriyaāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu*) performing the function of determining (*votthapanakicca*) arises and ceases. Immediately after that, the *javana* impels (*javanam javati*). Even in that context, neither on the occasion of *bhavaṅga* nor on any other occasion starting from the adverting (*āvajjana*) etc. is there either restraint (*saṃvara*) or non-restraint (*asaṃvara*). But at the moment of *javana* if immorality or forgetfulness or ignorance or intolerance or indolence arises, there is non-restraint (*asaṃvara*). When this happens, it is said “This is non-restraint in the eye-faculty.”²⁰

The terms connected with the consciousness process which appear in this passage are:

Table 2. Consciousness process in Vism 21.

Consciousness process in Vism 21		
(1) <i>bhavaṅga</i> rises and ceases twice		
Element (<i>dhātu</i>)		Function (<i>kicca</i>)
<i>kiriyaāmanodhātu</i>	(2)	<i>āvajjanakicca</i>
<i>cakkhuviññāṇa</i>	(3)	<i>dassanakicca</i>
<i>vipākamanodhātu</i>	(4)	<i>sampaṭicchanakicca</i>
<i>vipākāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu</i>	(5)	<i>santīraṇakicca</i>
<i>kiriyaāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu</i>	(6)	<i>votthapanakicca</i>
(7) <i>javanam javati</i>		

²⁰ *tattha kiñcāpi cakkhundriye saṃvaro vā asaṃvaro vā n’ atthi, na hi cakkhupasādaṃ nissāya sati vā muṭṭhasaccaṃ vā uppajjati. api ca yadā rūpārammaṇaṃ cakkhussa āpātham āgacchati, tadā bhavaṅge dvikkhattuṃ uppajjivā niruddhe, kiriyaāmanodhātu āvajjanakiccaṃ sādhamānā uppajjivā nirujjhati, tato cakkhuviññāṇaṃ dassanakiccaṃ, tato vipākamanodhātu sampaṭicchanakiccaṃ, tato vipākāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu santīraṇakiccaṃ, tato kiriyaāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu votthapanakiccaṃ sādhamānā uppajjivā nirujjhati, tadanantaram javanam javati. tatrāpi neva bhavaṅgasamaye na āvajjanādināṃ aññatarasamaye saṃvaro vā asaṃvaro vā atthi. javanakkhaṇe pana sace dussīlaṃ vā muṭṭhasaccaṃ vā aññāṇaṃ vā akkhanti vā kosajjaṃ vā uppajjati, asaṃvaro hoti. evaṃ honto pana so cakkhundriye asaṃvaro ti vuccati (Vism 21).*

This account does not include *tadārammaṇa*, and the subdivision in moments is almost absent, the only mention concerns the *bhavaṅga* that rises and ceases twice. Remarkably, there is no mention of many *javanas*, instead the *javana* process is treated as a whole. Overall, it seems that this passage does not consider the existence in time of these processes or, in other words, the temporal construction of the cognitive experience. It predominantly considers the different kinds of functions that occur and their order of sequence.

The subdivision in moments of the doctrine of momentariness is almost absent. This characteristic exposition has almost certainly been taken from old sources used to write the actual Pāli commentaries, and this will become more apparent in what follows.

5. A parallel to Vism 21 in the Pāli commentaries and other old accounts

In several commentaries there is a mnemonic verse listing the seven functions from *bhavaṅga* to *javana*; no doubt this belongs to the period of the old Sinhalese commentaries, if not earlier.

(Cousins 1981: 42–43)

Similar to Vism 21, unsurprisingly, there is a passage extant in many commentaries which clearly shows the same subdivision of the process in seven stages, omitting *tadārammaṇa* and mentioning *javana* in the singular form. The passage, as it appears in Sv I 194, is:

*bhavaṅgāvajjanaṃ c' eva dassanaṃ sampañcchanaṃ
santīraṇaṃ votthapanaṃ javanaṃ bhavati sattamaṃ ti.*²¹

These verses are followed by an explanation in prose which highlights the sequence of each stage and specifies the element (*dhātu*) that performs the function (*kicca*):

In this context, the *bhavaṅga* proceeds (*pavattati*) while performing the function of factor of coming into being of existence. Having interrupted

²¹ This passage is also reported in Ps I 262; Spk III 191; Vibh-a 356; Abhidh-av 165.

(*āvaṭṭetvā*)²² it, the functional mind element (*kiriya-manodhātu*) performs the function of advertizing (*āvajjanakicca*), from its cessation the eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇa*) performs the function of seeing (*dassanakicca*), from its cessation the resultant mind element (*vipākamanodhātu*) performs the function of receiving (*sampaṭicchana-kicca*), from its cessation the resultant discriminatory mind element (*vipākamanovīññāṇadhātu*) performs the function of investigating (*santīraṇakicca*), from its cessation the functional discriminatory mind element (*kiriya-manovīññāṇadhātu*) performs the function of determining (*votthapanakicca*), from its cessation the *javana* impels seven times (*sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javatī*).²³

A comparison between verses and prose would result in the following chart:

Table 3. Comparison between verses and prose.

Numeration	Verses	Prose	
	Stages	Element (<i>dhātu</i>)	Function (<i>kicca</i>)
(1)	<i>bhavaṅga</i>	<i>bhavaṅga</i>	<i>uppatibhavassa aṅgakiccaṃ</i>
(2)	<i>āvajjana</i>	<i>kiriya-mano</i>	<i>āvajjana</i>
(3)	<i>dassana</i>	<i>cakkhu-viññāṇa</i>	<i>dassana</i>
(4)	<i>sampaṭicchana</i>	<i>vipāka-mano</i>	<i>sampaṭicchana</i>
(5)	<i>santīraṇa</i>	<i>vipāka-mano-viññāṇa</i>	<i>santīraṇa</i>
(6)	<i>votthapana</i>	<i>kiriya-mano-viññāṇa</i>	<i>votthapana</i>
(7)	<i>javanaṃ bhavati sattamaṃ</i>	<i>sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javatī</i>	

²² It is worth noting the contraposition between the verb *pavattati* “to proceed” (Sanskrit: *pra-√vr̥t*) and *āvaṭṭeti* “to cause to turn round” (causative of *āvaṭṭati*; Sanskrit: *ā-√vr̥t*).

²³ *tattha bhavaṅgaṃ upapatti-bhavassa aṅga-kiccaṃ sādhayamānaṃ pavattati. taṃ āvaṭṭetvā kiriya-mano-dhātu āvajjana-kiccaṃ sādhayamānā, taṃ nirodhā cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ dassana-kiccaṃ sādhayamānaṃ, taṃ nirodhā vipāka-mano-dhātu sampaṭicchana-kiccaṃ sādhayamānā, taṃ nirodhā vipāka-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu santīraṇa-kiccaṃ sādhayamānā, taṃ nirodhā kiriya-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu votthapana-kiccaṃ sādhayamānā, taṃ nirodhā sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javatī* (Sv I 194–195). I amended *upapatti bhavassa* with *upapatti-bhavassa*; *vipāka-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu-santīraṇa-kiccaṃ* with *vipāka-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu santīraṇa-kiccaṃ*; *kiriya-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu-votthapana-kiccaṃ* with *kiriya-mano-viññāṇa-dhātu votthapana-kiccaṃ*, following Be.

This particular passage is worthy of a more detailed analysis. In this context, it would seem useful to distinguish between verse and prose because, in spite of the similarities and apparent coherence, some details may suggest a different chronology of these two parts. The prose would seem an expanded exposition of the verses which also introduces some innovations. The first clue is the word “*tattha*” with which the prose begins. The use of *tattha* to introduce a comment on a passage is well attested within the PED (s.v. *tattha*) and, within the passage itself, is clearly used with this function, such as some lines later when the seven *javanas* are mentioned and a deeper analysis is introduced by *tattha* (*sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javati. tattha paṭhama-javane pi ‘ayaṃ itthī ayaṃ puriso’ ti [...]*; Sv I 195). So, assuming that the prose is a kind of comment on the verses, it might be possible to consider the phrase *sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javati* as the mistaken exegesis of the last part of the verses, namely *javanaṃ bhavati sattaman*. The phrasing *javanaṃ bhavati* seems, indeed, a more archaic form since it only occurs in this passage and its parallels, whereas other elaborations prefer *javanaṃ javati*.²⁴ It might be a case of *lectio difficilior potior*, a fact corroborated by *javanaṃ anubhavati* which occurs in the *Atthasālinī* (272) within a section that, according to Cousins (1981: 38), has been directly taken from the Sinhalese commentaries, old sources used to compose the actual Pāli commentaries. A similar ancient origin has been attributed to the commentarial verses at stake (Cousins 1981: 42–43), suggesting that the similarity of the expressions is significant.

To assume a stark contrast between verse and prose is, of course, slightly speculative, although it goes without saying that, if the prose is really commenting on the verses, we should admit that a comment is naturally later than the text it comments on. Thus, it may be worth noting that in the *Abhidhammāvatāra* the verses occur without the prose passage (Abhidh-av 165). The supposed antiquity of the verses can be highlighted by their formal structure, which seems to date back to a period in which the text was still orally transmitted. These verses are, fundamentally, a list, and the last word (*sattamaṃ* “seventh”) reveals the number of items the list is composed of. As Rupert Gethin (1992: 149–150)

²⁴ E.g. Vism 21; It-a 97; As 265; Nidd-a I 391.

highlights, a list structure with an evident number of items can prevent the forgetfulness of one or more items during an oral performance. It goes without saying that the very fact of it being verses would aid the memorisation and the oral performance of the text. It is also worth noting that the actual Pāli commentaries that we have were written based on older sources, and it has already been noted that some of them were verses.²⁵ However, whether verses are older than prose or *vice versa* is an issue that examples in support of both options. In the literary history of India, the Upaniṣads written in prose are older than the ones in verses (see Olivelle 1998: 12–13), although the oldest Indian record of text, the *Ṛgveda*, is written in verses. In Buddhism itself we can find conflicting examples. On the one hand, we can consider the way in which the *Jātaka* was systematised, namely the canonical and older verses (*gāthā*) were combined with the later commentarial explanation and expansion in prose.²⁶ In this case, verses and prose would belong to a different time of composition and were put together only later.²⁷ On the other hand, other texts including a mixture of verses and prose cannot be said to have verses older than prose, an example is the *Abhidhammāvatāra*. The canonical work known as *Apadāna*, a collection of legends in verse, is believed to be one of the latest canonical works.²⁸ Therefore, considering that it is hard to establish, on a preliminary basis, whether the verses really are older than the prose, we embrace this assumption with caution and with the aim of corroborating it throughout the article. To start with, it is therefore significant that in the verses it is only reported that *javanaṃ bhavati sattaman* (“the *javana* comes as seventh”), whereas the prose passages comment upon the verses, stating *sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javati*

²⁵ See the Appendix IIa in Adikaram (1946: xvii–xxiii), who provides a list of verse quotations ascribed to the Ancients (*porāṇa*). Cousins (1981: 42–43) also suggested that the verses in Sv I 194 were mnemonic verses.

²⁶ To the composition of the *Jātaka* see, for instance, Norman (1983: 77–84); von Hinüber (1996: 54–58); Appleton (2010: 7); Guagni (2015: 66). However, in few instances, some prose passages of the *Jātaka* can also be considered canonical, see Norman (1983: 81).

²⁷ No later than the V century, the time in which Buddhaghosa started to write the Pāli commentaries. However, the possibility that these verses and prose were already together before Buddhaghosa cannot be ignored.

²⁸ For a critical re-examination of the *Apadāna*’s date, see Clark (2015: 7–12).

(“the *javana* impels seven times”). We know that the word “*sattama*” within the verses might have had at least two functions: (1) it was a memorisation tool: namely it points out how many items there are within a list in order to help the reciter to not forget any items; and (2) it had a filling function, in order to have enough syllables to complete the metric verse. However, a later commentator might have wondered if there was a special connection between the stage of *javana* and the number seven, in a broad sense. The prose passage comments upon each single word of the verse passage, replacing even *javanam bhavati* with *javanam javati*, the latter phrasing is much more widespread in the other post-canonical texts, thus giving the impression that the prose is actually modernising the exposition present in the verses. In addition, the prose passage might seem to replace “*sattama*” with “*sattakkhattu*,” reinterpreting an ordinal number with a cardinal number. Although this is far from definitive, and should be regarded purely as a speculative hypothesis, this might still be the only evidence to explain the way that the Theravāda tradition conceived the *javana*’s stage as consisting of many *javanas*, including up to seven.²⁹

5.1 *Abhidhammic evidence*

Abandoning the field of speculation and turning instead to the hard information, we may note that the commentarial passage (1) omits the *tadārammaṇa* stage; (2) does not mention any subdivision in time of the process, namely there is no trace of this feature of the doctrine of momentariness (only *javana* is described as impelling seven times by the prose passage); and (3) appears to ascribe the functions (*icca*), many of which occur in the late Abhidhammic work called *Paṭṭhāna*, with the elements (*dhātu*), some of which occur in the early Abhidhammic texts, such as the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga*.³⁰ Starting from the latter, we

²⁹ The fact that a certain kind of numerology could be at work in the determining of the precise number “seven” would not necessarily contradict my hypothesis, as the significance of the number “seven” could have prompted the exegete to convert the ordinal number “seventh” into the cardinal number “seven.”

³⁰ These two texts are often considered the earliest among the Abhidhammic texts. On *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* and *Vibhaṅga*, see Heim (2022).

may note that the elements involved in the commentarial passage are already present in the Abhidhamma, which reports in sequence: *cakkhu-viññāṇadhātu*, *manodhātu*, *manoviññāṇadhātu*:

In this context, what is the *manoviññāṇadhātu*? Once the *cakkhu-viññāṇadhātu* rose and then ceased, immediately after the *manodhātu* arises. Once the *manodhātu* rose and then ceased, immediately after *citta*, *manas* and *mānasa* arise... and from these *manoviññāṇadhātu* is born.³¹

A similar sequence can be found in the commentarial passage at stake, which equates the functions (*kicca*) reported in the verses with the elements (*dhātu*):

Table 4. Comparison between the *Vibhaṅga* and *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*.

<i>Vibhaṅga</i> 89–90	<i>Dhātus</i> (Sv I 194–195)	<i>Kiccas</i> (Sv I 194–195)
<i>cakkhuviññāṇadhātu</i>	<i>cakkhuviññāṇa</i>	<i>dassana</i>
<i>manodhātu</i>	<i>vipākamanodhātu</i>	<i>sampañicchana</i>
<i>manoviññāṇadhātu</i> *	<i>vipākamanoviññāṇadhātu</i> <i>kiriyaṃmanoviññāṇadhātu</i>	<i>santīraṇa</i> <i>vothapana</i>

* The equivalence of *manoviññāṇadhātu* with *santīraṇa* and *vothapana* is also sustained by a late Abhidhammic exegetical work; see *tasmā manodhātuyā pi santīraṇavotthapanādi-manoviññāṇadhātuyā pi ti evam attho gahetabbo* (Moh 128).

The same *dhātus* also occur in the semi-Abhidhammic *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, which, however, does not mention the functions (*kicca*):³²

The behaviour of consciousness (*viññāṇacariyā*) is the indeterminate function of advertent (*āvajjanakiriyaḍḍakata*) for the sake of seeing visible forms, the behaviour of consciousness is the eye consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) which has the aim of seeing visible forms, the behaviour of consciousness is the resultant mind element (*vipākamanodhātu*) which applies [the mind] because of the fact that visible forms have been seen, the behaviour of consciousness is the resultant discriminatory mind element

³¹ *tattha katamā manoviññāṇadhātu? cakkhuviññāṇadhātuyā uppajjivā niruddhasamanantarā uppajjati manodhātu, manodhātuyā pi uppajjivā niruddhasamanantarā uppajjati cittaṃ mano mānasaṃ ... pe ... tajjā manoviññāṇadhātu* (Vibh 89–90).

³² It mentions only *dassana*.

(*vipākamanoviññāṇadhātu*) caused by the application of mind to the visible forms.³³

Considering the Abhidhammic evidence, it may seem that the commentarial account provides the key to understanding a list of functions through the lens of the early Abhidhammic nomenclature. As Cousins (1981: 42) notes, *sampaṭicchana*, *santīraṇa*, and *votthapana* are not attested in any canonical text as specific names for functions in the process. Only the *Visuddhimagga-mahāṭīkā* reports that the nomenclature of the *cittavīthi*, such as *sampaṭicchana* etc., occurred in a text that could potentially be a canonical one, given that the term *pāli* is used to refer to it.³⁴ However, this text was lost or, at least, has not yet been recovered, by scholars. The information that we can infer from this evidence, if any, is that new terminology was carried forward by an authoritative text. To some extent, the commentarial verses are a list of terms which were commented on in prose. This commentarial evidence, if compared with some *Visuddhimagga* accounts and with the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, would lack some important characteristics, namely the stage called *tadārammaṇa* and an evident connection with the doctrine of momentariness in terms of subdivision of the whole process into sixteen/seventeen moments. In this regard, it would be worthwhile to wonder about the real nature of *tadārammaṇa*. In fact, *tadārammaṇa* seems to only be a specific name given to one or two moments of a particular kind of *bhavaṅga* that follow the *javana*'s process. In this regard, Cousins wrote that:

The term *tad-ārammaṇa* “having the same object” is used to indicate that this kind of *bhavaṅga* retains the object of the *javana* mind. It may perhaps be seen as fixing the conscious experience of the *javana* stage in the unconscious mind (1981: 28).

³³ *rūpesu dassanatthāya āvajjanakiriyābyākātā viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu dassanattho cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu dīṭṭhattā abhiniropanā vipākamanodhātu viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu abhiniropitattā vipākamanoviññāṇadhātu viññāṇacariyā* (Paṭis I 79).

³⁴ *ye hadayavatthu viya sampaṭicchanaḍḍivīthicittāni pi nānujānanti, tesam sampaṭicchanaḍḍaya cakkhuvīññāṇadhātuyā ti ādinā tattha tattha pāli āgatā. na hi sakkā pālīm paṭisedhetum* (Vism-mhṭ II 132 in Be). See Norman (1983: 1–2) for the use of “*pāli*” with reference to the canonical texts.

The *tadārammaṇa*'s characteristic of having been, at the beginning, only a particular name given to the first moments that follow the *javana* state, could not be immediately noticeable. Some treatments of *tadārammaṇa* might suggest that it is a different stage from *bhavaṅga*, such as when the *Visuddhimagga* reports that "at the end of *tadārammaṇa*, the *bhavaṅga* is set in motion again."³⁵ However, even if in the *Visuddhimagga* the *tadārammaṇa* became a stage in its own right in another Pāli commentary, namely the *Atthasālinī*, evidence of *tadārammaṇa* as a subcategory of *bhavaṅga* survives. Therefore, it is possible to find in As 270–271³⁶ that what is called *mūlabhavaṅga* ("root-*bhavaṅga*") is also called *tadārammaṇa*, or what is called *āgantukabhavaṅga* ("adventitious-*bhavaṅga*") is also called *tadārammaṇa*, and another name that seems to include all these definitions is *piṭṭhibhavaṅga* ("posterior-*bhavaṅga*").³⁷ According to Cousins (1981: 43), *tadārammaṇa* is not a term usually used in the Abhidhammic work entitled *Paṭṭhāna*, and in this text the phrase *vipāko tadārammaṇatā uppajjati* (e.g. Tikap 155) occurs, which could be the source for the later usage.³⁸

The commentarial version of the consciousness process in seven stages and the accounts including *tadārammaṇa* are not in contrast to each other because *tadārammaṇa* was only a particular kind of *bhavaṅga*. This would indicate that it could be safely integrated in the basic kernel provided by the commentarial account. A later hypothetical justification could claim that the *tadārammaṇa* had already been contemplated within the normal flow of consciousness made by a succession of consciousness processes.

It may seem that a ductile nature for the stage of *bhavaṅga* should be assumed. Being the first and the last stage of the process, it could be the one that allows for a new stage to be assimilated. In summary, it seems that the commentarial passage of Sv I 194 shares with the Abhidhamma a lack of the *tadārammaṇa* and places an emphasis on the sequence of

³⁵ *tadārammaṇāvasāne pana puna bhavaṅgam eva pavattati* (Vism 460).

³⁶ This is part of a section of the *Atthasālinī* that is, according to Cousins, "reproduced directly from an old source, almost certainly a Sinhalese *aṭṭhakathā*" (1981: 38).

³⁷ *piṭṭhibhavaṅgānī ti pi vuccanti* (As 271).

³⁸ A search for *vipāko tadārammaṇatā uppajjati* in the digital version of Be demonstrates that the phrase occurs forty-five times in the *Paṭṭhāna*.

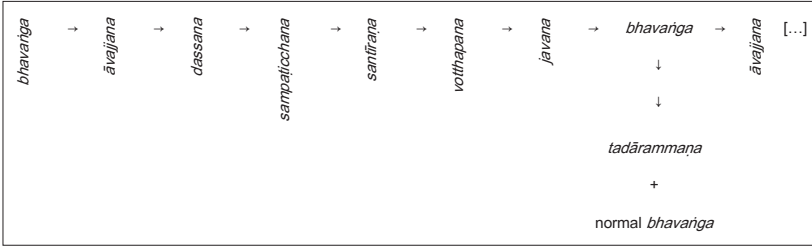


Figure 2. Consciousness process' succession.

the stages, rather than their momentariness, meaning that the passage does not emphasise the subdivision into moments for the whole process. Moreover, *tadārammaṇa* seems to be, in principle, a development from the *bhavaṅga* which has acquired importance over time, becoming a stage in its own. Therefore, it is worth considering the evidence provided by the Chinese **Vimuttimaggā* (*Jiětuō dào lùn* 解脱道論; T 1648), a text belonging to the Theravāda tradition (see Cousins 2012: 87), whose language may have even been Pāli (Nyanatusita 2021: 20–24).³⁹

5.2 The evidence of the **Vimuttimaggā*

As has already been highlighted, in the *Visuddhimaggā*, examples can be found both with and without *tadārammaṇa*. However, we should also assume that *tadārammaṇa* became an actual stage from an earlier date, given that it occurs in the **Vimuttimaggā*. Hence, considering that the **Vimuttimaggā* predates the *Visuddhimaggā* (and thus the actual Pāli commentaries as well) and the period of its composition could be between the 1st–2nd century and the 4th–5th century (but most likely only 2nd–4th),⁴⁰

³⁹ A different position concerning the original language of the **Vimuttimaggā* is expressed by Willemen (2023).

⁴⁰ Bapat (1937: LV) even suggests dating the **Vimuttimaggā* around the 1st–2nd century AD on the basis of the comparison with the *Peṭakopadesa* and *Nettipakarāṇa*. K. Kim (2018) suggests that the **Vimuttimaggā* was composed no later than 200 AD on the basis of the comparison with the occurrences of the term “*bhavaṅga*” within the *Milindapañha* (Kim 2018: 756) and *Paṭṭhāna* (Kim 2018: 757, 769). Therefore, it would be safe to assume a wide span of time when dating the text noting that it could be from the 1st–2nd

it might be useful to pay further attention to the analysis of a passage that mentions seven mental states, *qīxīn* 七心, which partly resemble the seven mental states that occur within the verses in Sv I 194. The passage is as follows:

Here, through the [fivefold sensual perception] process⁴¹ of an object of high [intensity], seven mental states, which are generated without interruption in an unbroken succession, are accomplished from the *bhavaṅga*: (1) adverting-(2)seeing (= **āvajjanadassana*),⁴² (3) *sampaṭicchana*, (4) *santīraṇa*, (5) *votthapana*, (6) *javana*, (7) *tadārammaṇa*.⁴³

We may note that the **Vimuttimaggā* retained a list of seven mental states (just as Sv I 194) yet also presented a different list of stages. Furthermore, in providing a list of seven items, *bhavaṅga* was left out to make room for *tadārammaṇa*. Thus, we might wonder whether the

century AD to the 4th–5th century AD (period in which, presumably, Buddhaghosa, the author of the *Visuddhimaggā*, lived). I would also suggest that this span of time could be narrowed slightly assuming that the *Mahāvamsa* is right to report that Buddhaghosa came to Ceylon during the reign of King Mahānāma, which is dated, according to Norman (1983: 130, n. 217), at the first half of the 5th century, perhaps 409–431 AD. Since the *Visuddhimaggā* was the first work composed by Buddhaghosa, it would make sense to believe not only that in the first half of the 5th century the **Vimuttimaggā* already existed, but also that it had already become famous enough to serve as a model to the composition of the *Visuddhimaggā*. Therefore, assuming that at the beginning of the 5th century the **Vimuttimaggā* was a well-established text within the Buddhist cultural milieu, it would make sense to suppose that it was already in existence within the 4th century. On the date of composition, also see Nyanatusita (2021: 44–49), who suggested as a period of composition the 2nd–5th century AD.

⁴¹ Here, I endorse the corrections of Nyanatusita (2021: 603, n. 201) on K. Kim (2015) concerning the interpretation of *jiá* 夾.

⁴² It is apparent that there is something strange in the item called *zhuanjiàn xīn* 轉見心, because it would be equivalent to two Pāli terms, namely *āvajjana* (= *轉心) and *dassana* (= *見心). But, if we split the compound, from *bhavaṅga* to *tadārammaṇa* there would be eight states of mind rather than seven. This was also clear to K. Kim (2018: 758), who, in order to solve the problem, established a dichotomy between the inactive state of mind of the *bhavaṅga* and the other active mental states, thus suggesting that “seven” refers to the active mental states that sprung from the *bhavaṅga* (which is inactive). This interpretation is also accepted by Nyanatusita (2021: 603), who clearly keeps *āvajjana* and *dassana* separated in his translation.

⁴³ 於是上事，以夾成七心無間生阿毘地獄從有分心：轉見心，所受心，分別心，令起心，速心，彼事心。(T1648.32.0449b06–08). My translation is based on the research works of K. Kim (2015; 2016; 2018) and Nyanatusita’s very recent English translation of the **Vimuttimaggā* (2021).

number “seven” was somehow meaningful.⁴⁴ Notably, in the **Vimuttimaggā*, there is evidence that the *tadārammaṇa* was already considered as something slightly different from the *bhavaṅga* as it is reported that “from this (i.e. *tadārammaṇa*, 彼事), the *bhavaṅga* flows again.”⁴⁵

Despite the occurrence of *tadārammaṇa*, the **Vimuttimaggā* presents a more archaic version of an account concerning different degrees of sensory intensity of the consciousness process. The process involving all the stages is a consciousness process that occurs when there is an object of high intensity (上事). This is the most sophisticated sequence of the process, but there are also two other shorter sequences concerning an object of middle intensity (中) and an object of low intensity (下).⁴⁶ This *topos* of analysing the consciousness process according to the intensity of the object involved in the process also occurs within other texts in Pāli. In the *Atthasālinī* (269–270), for instance, there is the distinction between a full process which occurs when there is a strong object (*balavārammaṇa*) and shorter processes caused by the weakness of the object (*ārammaṇadubbalatā*). There are three shorter processes, and they are called “useless occurrences” (*moghavāra*). A similar exposition of the consciousness process on the basis of the intensity of the object is also reported in *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (18), according to which there are four grades of intensity during the presentation of an object to the consciousness, namely: (1) extremely great (*atimahanta*), (2) great (*mahanta*), (3) slight (*paritta*), and (4) extremely slight (*atiparitta*). In all

⁴⁴ The translation I provided already embeds the emendation suggested by K. Kim (2018: 758), but as the original text in Chinese conflates two stages, namely *āvajjana* and *dassana* (*zhuanjiàn xīn* 轉見心 = **āvajjanadassana*), we could assume that the translator(s) conceptually included *bhavaṅga* among the seven mental states (just as Sv I 194). Indeed, if we have to count seven mental states (七心) looking for the words ending in *xīn* 心, we would have the following list: (1) *yǒufēn xīn* 有分心 (*bhavaṅga*), (2) *zhuanjiàn xīn* 轉見心 (**āvajjanadassana*), (3) *suǒshòu xīn* 所受心 (*sampaticchana*), (4) *fēnbié xīn* 分別心 (*santīraṇa*), (5) *lǐngqǐ xīn* 令起心 (*votthapana*), (6) *sù xīn* 速心 (*javana*), (7) *bìshì xīn* 彼事心 (*tadārammaṇa*). Indulging in speculations, we might wonder whether the translator(s) made this mistake on purpose in order to have a list of seven items starting from *bhavaṅga* up to *tadārammaṇa*, having as a prototype in mind the list of seven stages in Sv I 194, which, however, does not include *tadārammaṇa*.

⁴⁵ 從彼更度有分心 (T1648.32.0449b17). Cf. *tad-ārammaṇāvasāne pana puna bhavaṅgam eva pavattati* (Vism 460).

⁴⁶ T1648.32.0449c8–10.

these examples, the *tadārammaṇa* occurs only in the strongest grade (**Vimuttimaggā* = 上事; *Atthasālinī* = *balavārammaṇa*; *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* = *atimahanta*). However, despite the similarities between the Chinese **Vimuttimaggā* and Pāli texts, there are also some important differences. First, it should be noted that in the **Vimuttimaggā* only three grades of intensity are considered, whereas the other Pāli sources present four grades. In this regard, it seems that the Pāli texts expanded the list of three grades which survived within the **Vimuttimaggā*, since they include all three grades plus a fourth one, which is extremely short.

Table 5. Representation of different degrees of sensory intensity of the consciousness process. The arrows indicate the end of the process, which, at its maximum extension, proceeds from *bhavaṅga* to *tadārammaṇa*.

Texts	Grade of intensity <i>Cittavīthi</i>		disturbed <i>bhavaṅga</i>	<i>votthapana</i>	<i>javana</i>	<i>tadārammaṇa</i>
* <i>Vimuttimaggā</i>	上					→
	中				→	
	下			→		
<i>Atthasālinī</i>	<i>balavārammaṇa</i>					→
	<i>ārammaṇadub-balatā</i>	III <i>moghavāra</i>			→	
		II <i>moghavāra</i>		→		
		I <i>moghavāra</i>	→			
<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i>	<i>atimahanta</i>					→
	<i>mahanta</i>				→	
	<i>paritta</i>			→		
	<i>atiparitta</i>		→			

The table shows clearly that the three grades in the Pāli texts are the same grades of the **Vimuttimaggā*. Theoretically, we may wonder who modified the account. Had the Chinese list of three grades shortened the Pāli lists of four grades, or had the Pāli lists of four grades enlarged the Chinese list of three grades? The answer lies in the exegetical method of

which the theory of consciousness process is imbued with. This method characterised the Abhidhamma works and, unsurprisingly, the *Atthasālinī* is a Pāli commentary on the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, an Abhidhamma work, and the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* is a late Abhidhamma manual. One of the characteristics of the attempt made by the Abhidhamma to give a comprehensive statement of the Buddhist teaching is, indeed, the tendency to consider all circumstances and eventualities.⁴⁷ This inclusive trend would indicate that it is more likely that a new possibility would be added into a list that considers all possible interactions between the consciousness process and the intensity of the object presented to the sense-doors than the hypothesis that a possibility would be deleted without any apparent reason. On this basis, it appears that the **Vimuttimaggā*'s account would represent a less developed categorisation of the intensity of the objects, a fact that would agree with the theories concerning its estimated absolute and relative chronology.

Finally, it is worth noting that the **Vimuttimaggā* reports a consciousness process doctrine with all the stages up to the *tadārammaṇa*, together with the simile of the mango fruit, but at the same time, there is no reference to the main point of the doctrine of momentariness, namely that the duration of materiality consists of sixteen thought moments.⁴⁸ This evidence may suggest a certain independence of the consciousness process from some aspects of the doctrine of momentariness. Then, we are entitled to question the relationship between the doctrine of the consciousness process and the doctrine of momentariness, and, in particular, whether the first was an actual outcome of the second. Rather, it seems

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Gethin (1998: 208).

⁴⁸ In this regard, see W. D. Kim (1999: 173–186 = 2023: 157–168). I should specify that I do not agree with all the conclusions achieved by Kim. For example, he writes “[i]f we accept that the **Vimuttimaggā* was composed in India and brought over to Ceylon, and came to be well-known among Abhayagiri-vāsins, it is hardly surprising that a theory which originated in Ceylon was not included in the text of Indian origin” (Kim 1999: 251 = 2023: 228–229). Concerning the **Vimuttimaggā*, I think it is safer to stay with Cousins (2012: 87), who claims an origin within a tradition derived from Ceylon, despite the actual geographical origin of the text. This topic is necessarily associated with the study concerning the existence of a Theravādin network that connected the Indian mainland with the Ceylon Island. In this regard, see Cousins (1981: 22–23; 2001) and Wynne (2018).

that the consciousness process acquired an emphasised subdivision in moments at the time of the *Visuddhimagga*, thus allowing us to see a progressive development and an increase in the relationship between the two doctrines.

6. Corroborating the hypothesis (I): the exegetical context of development

The often-repeated association of the consciousness process with the subdivision into sixteen/seventeen moments of the doctrine of momentariness does not help, in my opinion, to fully understand the real context of formation. This association is, indeed, mainly established in later texts and the excessive focus on it may have led scholars to overlook that less developed accounts occur in specific contexts and concern problems which are more closely connected with the early canonical texts.

Starting from the account in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, it should be highlighted that our list of seven mental stages appears within a section entitled by T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, in their edition of the *Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā*, “*sati-sampajaññaṃ*,” a section which seems to run from Sv I 183 to Sv I 204.⁴⁹ The compound *sati-sampajañña* indicates that the subject matter is the mindfulness, given that *sampajañña* is almost a synonym of *sati* (s.v. *sampajañña* in PED).⁵⁰ Checking within the *Dīghanikāya*, it is immediately clear that the commentary is regarding a passage which follows the exposition of morality (*sīla*). According to Giuliano Giustarini (2017), morality does not act just as a mere prerequisite but maintains a continuous interaction with other factors of the path of liberation. In this regard, it will be possible to observe how the

⁴⁹ There is disagreement between the index of the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* and the headings of the pages in the body of text. For example, the index states that the section concerning *sati-sampajaññaṃ* runs from page 180 to 203, while we still find the heading *sati-sampajaññaṃ* at the top of page 207. I regarded the “*sati-sampajañña*’s section” from what the commentary itself calls *sati-sampajañña-bhājanīya* (Sv I 183) to the beginning of the comment on the next stage of the Buddhist path of liberation, namely when the monk becomes content [with his frugal life] (*idha Mahārāja bhikkhu santuṭṭho hotī ti*; Sv I 204).

⁵⁰ However, I should highlight that at least in S V 180–181 the Buddhist tradition seems to make a distinction between *sati* and *sampajañña*. I owe this reference to Giuliano Giustarini.

consciousness process occurs as an exegetical explanatory tool in contexts which involve mindfulness (*sati-sampajañña*) and/or morality (*sīla*). Sometimes, the impression is that the mindfulness is applied for the sake of morality.⁵¹

To be more specific, the list of seven stages of the consciousness process in Sv I 194 comments upon a *Dīghanikāya* passage which begins: “And how, great king, a monk is endowed with mindfulness (*sati*) and perfect comprehension (*sampajañña*)?”⁵² The text continues by answering the question and providing a commentarial explanation, as well as a list of the seven stages of the consciousness process. Additionally, it comments upon the lemma *ālokite vilokite* of the canonical phrase “he is one who acts with complete comprehension (*sampajāna*) regarding looking ahead (*ālokita*) and looking around (*vilokita*).”⁵³ The commentarial exegesis starts by clarifying what the lemma *ālokite vilokite* means and, thereafter, describes four kinds of full comprehension (*sampajañña*) that should be applied to the actions of looking ahead and looking around:

- *Sāttahasampajañña* “Full comprehension of what has benefit”
- *Sappāyasampajañña* “Full comprehension of suitability”⁵⁴
- *Gocarasampajañña* “Full comprehension during the alms-round”⁵⁵
- *Asammahasampajañña* “Full comprehension through non-delusion”⁵⁶

⁵¹ A recent study on the relation between morality and mindfulness is that of Shulman (2024).

⁵² *kathaṇ ca mahā-rāja sati-sampajaññena samannāgato hoti?* (D I 70).

⁵³ *ālokite vilokite sampajānakārī hoti* (D I 70).

⁵⁴ The term *sappāyasampajañña* does not appear within the passage which only reports *api ca idhāpi pubbe vutta-cetiya-dassanādi-vasen’ eva sāttakatā ca sappāyatā ca vedītabbā* (Sv I 194). However, *sappāyasampajañña* occurs in Sv I 185.

⁵⁵ This translation of the term is based upon the definition of *gocarasampajañña* given in Sv I 185–186: *evaṃ parigahita-sāttaka-sappāyassa pana atṭha-ttiṃsāya kammatṭhānesu attano citta-ruciyaṃ kammattṭhāna-saṃkhātāṃ gocaraṃ uggahetvā bhikkhācāra-gocare taṃ gahetvā va gamaṇaṃ gocara-sampajaññaṃ nāma*. I interpreted *bhikkhācāra* as “the practice to go for alms” since this is the meaning that it seems to have in a later passage (*bhikkhācāraṇāya utṭahitvā*; Sv I 186) and, indeed, this commentarial passage continues describing a monk who goes to a village for alms (*gāmaṃ piṇḍāya pavisati*; Sv I 186). It seems that the act of moving for alms performed by a monk is compared with the grazing (*cara*) of cows (*go*) through the term *gocara*.

⁵⁶ This fourfold classification is also reported within the s.v. *sampajañña* in PED, see also Anālayo (2006: 682).

This fourfold way to practice *sampajañña* had already been introduced by the commentary in some previous pages during the explanation of the lemma *sampajāna-kārī hoti*.⁵⁷ Therefore, more detailed definitions for these types of *sampajañña* are provided in the commentary from Sv I 184 to Sv I 193. The consciousness process expressed through a list of seven stages appears within the section that discusses the lemma *ālokite vilokite* with reference to the “Full comprehension through the non-delusion” (*asammohasampajañña*). This particular kind of comprehension aims to eradicate the false idea that there is a self (*attan*) who acts behind our actions. In this case, it is affirmed that “there is not a self inside [the body] which is one who looks ahead (*āloketar*) or one who looks around (*viloketar*).”⁵⁸ In order to justify this statement, the text explains how the physical and mental actions of seeing take place:

When the thought “I will look ahead!” arises, together with this same thought the wind element (*vāyo-dhātu*) caused by the thought, which generates the information (*viññatti*),⁵⁹ arises. Thus, through the diffusion of the wind element due to the action of the thought, the lower eyelid sinks down and the upper eyelid jumps up; there is not anyone who opens it through a mechanism. Then the eye-consciousness, which performs the function of seeing, arises. This is the discernment that here is called “Full comprehension through non-delusion” (*asammohasampajañña*).⁶⁰

It is as if the mental thought generates the electric impulse (*vāyo-dhātu*),⁶¹ which causes the eye to open through the eyelid shift and, after that, the

⁵⁷ *sampajāna-kārī hoti ti, sampajaññena sabba-kicca-kārī, sampajaññass’ eva vā kārī [...] tattha satthaka-sampajaññaṃ sappāyasampajaññaṃ gocarasampajaññaṃ asammohasampajaññaṃ ti catubbidhaṃ sampajaññaṃ* (Sv I 184).

⁵⁸ *abbhantare attā nāma āloketā vā viloketā vā n’ atthi* (Sv I 194).

⁵⁹ On the concept of “*viññatti*” see Harvey (1993: 34–35) and Karunadasa (2010: 189–198) who translates it as “intimation.”

⁶⁰ *ālokesāmi ti pana citte uppañamāne ten’ eva cittaena saddhiṃ citta-samuṭṭhānā vāyo-dhātu viññattiṃ janayamānā uppañjati. iti citta-kiriya-vāyo-dhātu-vipphāravasen’ eva hetthimaṃ akkhi-dalaṃ adho sīdati, uparimaṃ uddhaṃ lañgheti. koci yantakena vicaranto [Be vivaranto] nāma n’ atthi. tato cakkhu-viññāṇaṃ dassana-kiccaṃ sādheṇaṃ uppañjati ti evaṃ pajānanaṃ paṇ’ ettha asammoha-sampajaññaṃ nāma* (Sv I 194). I emended *vāyo-dhātu-viññattiṃ* with *vāyo-dhātu viññattiṃ* on the basis of the parallel passages in Ps I 262; Spk III 191; Vibh-a 356. I translated *Be vivaranto* in place of *PTS vicaranto*.

⁶¹ See Harvey (1993: 35), regarding the comparison of *vāyo-dhātu* with the modern concept of electrical discharge in the nerves. See also Killingley (2006: 103, endnote 15), who interprets *vāyu* as a kind of shock, the motion or the kinetic energy.

eye consciousness arises and allows the individual to see. Thereafter, the commentary states that the *asammohasampajañña* should be understood through:

- Full knowledge about the roots (*mūlapariññā*)
- The visitor (*āgantuka*)
- Temporality (*tāvakālikabhāva*)

The verses with the seven stages of the consciousness process together with their comment in prose constitute the section concerning the “Full knowledge about the roots” (*mūlapariññā*). This is the context of the comment within *Dīghanikāya*’s commentary, and it has parallels in the other Pāli commentaries.⁶² The parallel within the *Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* is part of the comment on the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*; within the *Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā* it is part of the comment on the *Satipaṭṭhānasamyutta*; within the *Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā* it is part of the comment on the *Suttanta-bhājanīya* of a *Mātikā* called *Jhānavibhaṅga*, which, in spite of the title, deals extensively with morality and mindfulness (cf. Vibh 244–245). Clearly, the fact that these passages are parallels would lead us to believe that they should comment on a similar passage. However, it is possible to observe the existence of a connection with morality and mindfulness to other consciousness process accounts which show a more developed structure. Within Vism 21–22 the consciousness process is explained in a paragraph entitled *Indriyasaṃvarasīla*, during treatment of the restraint (*saṃvara*) or non-restraint (*asaṃvara*) regarding the faculty of sight (*cakkhundriya*).⁶³ A similar connection with mindfulness and morality is found within the passages that describe the consciousness processes on the basis of the different grades of intensity during the contact of senses and objects. The **Vimuttimaggā* in Chinese, after having presented the three grades of the consciousness process, states that:

Through right attention and non-right attention as a condition, one would know a variety of, respectively, wholesome and unwholesome states.⁶⁴

⁶² A section from the comment on the lemma *sampajāna-kārī hoti* to the application of *asammohasampajañña* to the lemma *ālokite vilokite* (Sv I 184–196) is reported also in Ps I 253–264; Spk III 182–193; Vibh-a 347–358.

⁶³ A similar context is reported in It-a 97; Nidd-a I 390–391.

⁶⁴ 以正作意非正作意緣，種種善不善可知 (T1648.32.0449c15–16).

The term *zhèng zuòyì* 正作意 is equivalent to the Pāli *yoniso-manasikāra* (Hirakawa 1997: 683), which is connected to mindfulness (*sati*)⁶⁵ and in turn seems connected to morality through the words *kusala* and *akusala* (*kusalākusala* = *shàn bùshàn* 善不善). A connection with morality is also present within the *Atthasālinī* (269–270), a Pāli version of the consciousness process based on the different grades of intensity of the objects perceived. Therefore, at the beginning of the account (As 269), it is stated that after issuing from the womb a being gains a certain status of restraint (*saṃvara*) and non-restraint (*asaṃvara*).

A less direct reference is found within Vism 452–460, in which words such as *saṃvara*, *asaṃvara*, etc. do not occur. However, the reference to the consciousness process is located within a paragraph called *Viññāṇakkhandha*, in which the manifestation of eighty-nine kinds of consciousness through fourteen modes is exposed:

These [kinds of consciousness] occur in fourteen modes: (1) *paṭisandhi*, (2) *bhavaṅga*, (3) *āvajjana*, (4) *dassana*, (5) *savana*, (6) *ghāyana*, (7) *sāyana*, (8) *phusana*, (9) *sampañicchana*, (10) *santīraṇa*, (11) *voṭṭhapana*, (12) *javana*, (13) *tadārammaṇa*, (14) *cuti*.⁶⁶

In this passage, the moments of death (*cuti*) and rebirth (*paṭisandhi*) are also involved since the aim is probably to include the whole human existence. The remaining modes consist of the stages of the consciousness process, from *bhavaṅga* to *tadārammaṇa*, including the physical senses' activities of seeing (*dassana*), hearing (*savana*), smelling (*ghāyana*), tasting (*sāyana*), and touching (*phusana*). The eighty-nine kinds of consciousness that come into being in these fourteen modes are classified depending on whether they are profitable (*kusala*), unprofitable (*akusala*), or indeterminate (*avyākata*). This subdivision of the consciousness

⁶⁵ It is regarded within the *Āhārasutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* as the base of mindfulness: *ko ca bhikkhave āhāro anuppannassa vā satisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā satisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāya pāripūriyā. atthi bhikkhave satisambojjhaṅgaṭṭhāniyā dhammā, tatha yoniso manasikārabahulikāro ayam āhāro anuppannassa vā satisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā satisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāya pāripūriyā* (S V 103–104), see also Hwang (2006: 52).

⁶⁶ *yāni paṭisandhi-bhavaṅg'-āvajjana-dassana-savana-ghāyana-sāyana-phusana-sampañicchana-santīraṇa-voṭṭhapana-javana-tadārammaṇa-cutivasena cuddasahi ākārehi pavattanti* (Vism 457).

is connected with the Buddhist ethic, namely with the Buddhist doctrine of *karman* (see Karunadasa 2010: 83). The terms *kusala* and *akusala* are, indeed, connected with many aspects of the Buddhist doctrine, and one of them is certainly the moral one.⁶⁷

Given that there are traces of a connection with the practice of mindfulness and morality in the passages analysed, it is worth noting that the most comprehensive and longest account is recovered within Sv I 193–194 and parallels,⁶⁸ and the passage within the *Visuddhimagga*, which shares the closest structure of this consciousness process (Vism 21–22), is also the one that clearly deals with the application of mindfulness for the sake of the practice of morality:

In this context, there is nothing about restraint (*saṃvara*) or non-restraint (*asaṃvara*) in the eye-faculty since, depending upon the eye sensitivity, neither mindfulness nor forgetfulness arises.⁶⁹

Another remarkable particular of this *Visuddhimagga* passage is that a moral fault or a lack of mindfulness is only manifested during the *javana*'s moment:

Even in that context, neither on the occasion of *bhavaṅga* nor on any other occasion starting from the advertent (*āvajjana*) etc. is there either restraint (*saṃvara*) or non-restraint (*asaṃvara*). But in the moment of *javana*, if immorality or forgetfulness or ignorance or intolerance or indolence arises, there is non-restraint (*asaṃvara*). When this happens, it is said “This is non-restraint in the eye-faculty.”⁷⁰

So, it would seem that *javana* is a key-stage in the process. This is also attested within the commentarial account in which the consciousness

⁶⁷ “The use of the two terms *kusala* (skillful) and *akusala* (unskillful) to denote what is morally good and evil respectively shows the close affinity between Buddhist ethics and Buddhist psychology” (Karunadasa 2010: 88). A similar statement was made by Harvey: “*Kusala* states come from wise skill and contribute to wise skill and are both morally and spiritually wholesome” ([2010] 2011: 207).

⁶⁸ Sv I 193–194 = Ps I 261–262; Spk III 190–191; Vibh-a 355–356.

⁶⁹ *tattha kiñcāpi cakkhundriye saṃvaro vā asaṃvaro vā n’ atthi, na hi cakkhupasādaṃ nissāya sati vā muṭṭhasaccaṃ vā uppajjati* (Vism 21).

⁷⁰ *tatrāpi neva bhavaṅgasamaye na āvajjanādināṃ aññatarasamaye saṃvaro vā asaṃvaro vā atthi. javanakkhaṇe pana sace dussīlyaṃ vā muṭṭhasaccaṃ vā aññāṇaṃ vā akkhanti vā kosajjaṃ vā uppajjati, asaṃvaro hoti. evaṃ honto pana so cakkhundriye asaṃvaro ti vuccati* (Vism 21).

process is described through the list of seven elements in Sv I 193–194 and parallels. This list is part of a subsection called “Full knowledge about the roots” (*mūlapariññā*) within the section called “Full comprehension through the non-delusion” (*asammohasampajañña*). Notably, the other two subsections, namely (1) the visitor (*āgantuka*) and (2) temporality (*tāvakālikabhāva*), deal primarily with the stage of *javana*.

In the first case, the stage of *javana* should be regarded as a visitor (*āgantuka*) who enters a house and who would act in an improper way if he would start to ask for something or to give orders when the owner sits in silence. In the same way, the *javana* should not lust for, hate, or become deluded at the eye door, which is the state of dwelling of *āvajjana*, etc.⁷¹

In the second case, the *javana* should be regarded as something that is running out of time, and so it has a limited time and is close to dying. Just as for a man, within a house full of dead people, who will die in this very moment, it would be improper to dance, sing, etc.; in the same way it would be improper for the *javana* to enjoy lust, hatred, and delusion.⁷²

Given that the *javana* seems a key stage within the consciousness process, in the expositions elaborated on in a context in which the topic concerns mindfulness and morality, the oldest reference to *javana* within the Nikāyas (namely within the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*) unsurprisingly involves morality. In fact, it occurs within a part that begins with the

⁷¹ Cf. *cakkhu-dvāre pana rūpe āpātha-gate bhavaṅga-calanato uddham saka-saka-kicca-nipphādana-vasena āvajjanādisu uppajjivā niruddhesu avasāne javanaṃ uppajjati. taṃ pubbe uppannānaṃ āvajjanādināṃ geha-bhūte cakkhu-dvāre āgantuka-puriso viya hoti. tassa yathā paragehe kiñci yācituṃ pavittṭhassa āgantuka-purisassa geha-sārikesu tuṇhīm āsinesu āṇa-karaṇaṃ na yuttaṃ, evaṃ āvajjanādināṃ geha-bhūte cakkhu-dvāre āvajjanādisu pi arajjantesu adussantesu amuyhantesu ca rajjana-dussana-muyhanaṃ ayuttan ti evaṃ āgantuka-bhāva-vasena asammoha-sampajaññaṃ vedittabbaṃ* (Sv I 195).

⁷² Cf. *yāni pan’ etāni cakkhu-dvāre-votthapana-pariyosānāni cittāni uppajjanti, tāni saddhiṃ sampayutta-dhammehi tattha tatth’ eva bhijjanti, aññaṃ aññaṃ na passantīti ittarāni tāvakālikāni honti. tattha yathā ekasmiṃ ghare sabbesu mānusesu matesu avasesassa ekassa taṃ khaṇaṃ yeva maraṇa-dhammassa na yuttā nacca-gītādisu abhirati nāma, evaṃ evaṃ eka-dvāre sasampayuttakesu āvajjanādisu tattha tatth’ eva matesu avasesassa taṃ khaṇaṃ yeva maraṇa-dhammassa javanassāpi rajjana-dussana-muyhana-vasena abhirati nāma na yuttā ti evan tāvakālika-bhāva-vasena asammoha-sampajaññaṃ vedittabbaṃ* (Sv I 195).

following question: “How is that the wisdom concerning the determination of behaviours is the knowledge concerning the variety of behaviours?”⁷³ According to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, there are three kinds of behaviours (*cariyā*): the behaviour of consciousness (*viññāṇacariyā*), the behaviour of unknowing (*aññāṇacariyā*), and the behaviour of knowing (*ñāṇacariyā*). The behaviour of consciousness (*viññāṇacariyā*) includes some elements which have parallels in the more standardised accounts of the consciousness process, and so this account would seem to be the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*’s version of the consciousness process. For example, for what concern the action of seeing (*dassana*) it is stated:

The behaviour of consciousness (*viññāṇacariyā*) is the indeterminate function of advertent (*āvajjanakiriyābyākata*) for the sake of seeing visible forms, the behaviour of consciousness is the eye consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*) which fulfils the aim of seeing visible forms, the behaviour of consciousness is the resultant mind element (*vipākamanodhātu*) which applies [the mind] because of the fact that visible forms have been seen, the behaviour of consciousness is the resultant discriminatory mind element (*vipākamanoviññāṇadhātu*) caused by the application of mind to the visible forms.⁷⁴

This structure is repeated for the actions of hearing (*savana*), smelling (*ghāyana*), tasting (*sāyana*), touching (*phussana*), and knowing (*viñānana*). Furthermore, it is stated that it is *viññāṇacariyā* since it behaves without passion (*nirāga*), without hatred (*nidosa*), without delusion (*nimoha*), and so on (there is a long list of negative behaviours). Since the behaviour of consciousness (*viññāṇacariyā*) is free from negative behaviours, it is stated that “completely pure is the natural starting point of this mind, because of the absence of defilements.”⁷⁵ Thereafter, the behaviour of unknowing (*aññāṇacariyā*) is explained and so it is evident which stage of the mental process is able to convey defilements:

⁷³ *kathaṃ cariyāvavathhāne paññā cariyānānante ñāṇaṃ* (Paṭis I 79).

⁷⁴ *rūpesu dassanatthāya āvajjanakiriyābyākata viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu dassanattho cakkhuviññāṇaṃ viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu dīṭṭhattā abhiniropanā vipākamanodhātu viññāṇacariyā, rūpesu abhiniropitattā vipākamanoviññāṇadhātu viññāṇacariyā* (Paṭis I 79).

⁷⁵ *pakatiparisuddhaṃ idaṃ cittaṃ nikkilesatṭhena* (Paṭis I 80). This part of the consciousness process, lacking the stage of *javana*, is regarded as pure. The word “*pakati*” highlights that the consciousness process is completely pure (*parisuddha*) during its first stages.

The behaviour of unknowing (*aññānacariyā*) is the *javana* of passion (*rāga*), is the behaviour of consciousness (*viññānacariyā*) which has the indeterminate function of advertizing (*āvajjanakiriyābyākata*) for the sake of the *javanās* of passion concerning the physical forms dear to the mind.⁷⁶

The same structure is repeated also for *dosa*, *moha*, and many others negative things. Here, it is clearly stated that the *javana* is responsible for the introduction – in such a “pure” mental process – of negative factors such as *rāga*, *dosa*, *moha*, and so on. This is exactly what the commentarial literature complained about *javana* and so recommended to regard *javana* as a visitor (*āgantuka*) and through the characteristic of temporality (*tāvakālikabhāva*). It is therefore significant that the exposition in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (and parallels) is conceptually connected to that of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, one of our oldest sources (together with the texts of the Abhidhamma texts) in which there are some harbingers of the consciousness process. The importance of *javana* in the consciousness process could also be deduced from the **Vimuttimaggā*, which states that “the *javana* is the knower.”⁷⁷ The *javana* stage is, indeed, the stage that enjoys or makes use of the sensory data gathered and processed by the other mental functions. Therefore, the simile of the doorkeeper (*dovāriya/dovārika*; As 279–280) describes the process through which a sleeping king receives an object. The object is first received by and goes through his attendants – which represent the various mental functions – and, finally, ends up into the hands of the king, who is the only one who enjoys it. So, the king is compared to the *javana* stage since it is the only stage that can experience the object perceived.⁷⁸ A similar story also occurs within the **Vimuttimaggā*, which establishes the same comparison between the king and the *javana*.⁷⁹

On the basis of these considerations, it is possible to state that there is a connection between the consciousness process and mindfulness and/or

⁷⁶ *manāpiyesu rūpesu rāgassa javanattāyā āvajjanakiriyābyākata viññānacariyā rāgassa javanā aññānacariyā* (Paṭis I 80).

⁷⁷ 識者速心 (T1648.32.0449b02). According to Hirakawa (1997: 1097), the term *shizhē* 識者 could be translated by the Sanskrit *jānaka* or *vijñātr*, namely the “knower.”

⁷⁸ *rañño paribhogakālo viya javanassa ārammaṇarasānubhavanakālo* (As 280).

⁷⁹ “Thus, the king who eats the fruit should be understood just as the *javana*” (如王食彼菓如是速心可知; T1648.32.0449c06).

morality within all the passages previously analysed. The *javana* is a key stage because it is the one in which the process of perception comes to culmination. It is also the one in which a moral fault might happen and could even bring defilements such as *rāga*, *dosa*, *moha*.⁸⁰ So, it may seem that the speculative theory of the consciousness process was created in order to understand in which part of the process the mind is defiled by something.⁸¹ In order to achieve this goal, the ontologically existing mental states were put in a row, in a sequence, outlining the contribution of each stage to the process. This clearly implies an atomisation of the process in order to be sure that each stage does not include other sub-stages. However, I would highlight that the temporal existence of these phenomena is not the main concern but instead, perhaps, is a secondary outcome of the atomisation of the mental process. The primary objective would be to identify the different stages of the process and to understand the sequence that underlines the process. Therefore, the expectation would be to find a particular emphasis on the sequence of the stages within the texts. This expectation is satisfied by the scattered evidence concerning the *citta-niyāma*.

7. Corroborating the hypothesis (II): *citta-niyāma*

The *citta-niyāma* explained in the *Atthasālinī* is clearly the seven stages of the consciousness process and the compound aims to emphasise the ineluctable sequence of the mental stages:

When the sensitivity [of a sense organ] is struck by an object, there is no doer or agent [who says]: “Be advertent! ... be *javana*!” The *bhavaṅga* turns to the mind of *kiriyaṃanodhātu*, starting from the time in which there was the striking of the sensitivity [of a sense organ] by an object according to the natural law (*dhammatā*) itself. Then, the *cakkhuvīññāṇa*

⁸⁰ On the ethical importance of the stage of *javana*, see Skorupski (2014: 66); Smith (2020: 477–478).

⁸¹ According to a canonical account, the mind is luminous but is defiled by arriving impurities (*pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ taṇ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhan ti*; A I 10). In this context, according to the commentary, the mind (*citta*) is the *bhavaṅgacitta* (*cittān ti bhavaṅgacittaṃ*; Mp I 60) and the impurities are not co-nascent with the mind but are coming to defile after the *javana* stage (*āgantukehī ti asahajātehi, pacchā javanakkhaṇe uppajjanakehi*; Mp I 60). See Cousins (1973: 117, 128, n. 11).

accomplishes the function of seeing (*dassanakicca*), the *vipākamanodhātu* accomplishes the function of receiving (*sampaṭicchana*), *vipākamanoviññādhātu* accomplishes the function of investigation (*sañtīraṇakicca*), *kiriyaṇamanoviññādhātu* accomplishes the function of determining (*voṭṭhabbanakicca*), the *javana* enjoys the taste of the object. This is called *citta-niyāma*.⁸²

It is worth noting that in this passage the consciousness process ends with the stage of *javana*, not with *tadārammaṇa*, though the passage occurs in a chapter which deals extensively with the concept of *tadārammaṇa*. This is in agreement with the reconstruction of the consciousness process theory expressed so far, namely that the first stage of development ended with the stage of *javana*, whereas the *tadārammaṇa* is a later addition, and that the main focus was on the sequence of the process rather than on its expression within a temporal framework. The sequence of the stages involved is not only an important feature, but is also ineluctable. The simple fact that there is a sequence of events that will always be the same is exactly what the term *niyāma* means in this context. Therefore, in another Pāli commentary (i.e. Sv II 432) the term *niyama* (variant reading of *niyāma*) is used to explain the term *dhammatā*, together with the term *sabhāva*.⁸³ The text states that *niyāma* is fivefold: the natural order of *kamma* (*kamma-niyāma*), the natural order of seasons (*utu-niyāma*), the natural order of seeds (*bīja-niyāma*), the natural order of minds (*citta-niyāma*), and the natural order of Dhamma (*dhamma-niyāma*).⁸⁴ Among these five *niyāmas*, the *citta-niyāma* is described as follows:

⁸² *ārammaṇena pana pasāde ghaṭṭite tvaṃ āvajjanaṃ nāma hohi ...pe... tvaṃ javanaṃ nāma hohi ti koci kattā vā kāretā vā natthi. attano attano pana dhammatāya evaṃ ārammaṇena pasādassa ghaṭṭitakālato paṭṭhāya kiriyaṇamanodhātucittaṃ bhavaṅgaṃ āvaṭṭeti, cakkhuviññāṇaṃ dassanakiccaṃ sādheti, vipākamanodhātu sampaṭicchana-kiccaṃ sādheti, vipākamanoviññādhātu sañtīraṇakiccaṃ sādheti, kiriyaṇamanoviññādhātu voṭṭhapanakiccaṃ sādheti, javanaṃ ārammaṇarasaṃ anubhavaṭi ti ayaṃ cittaniyāmo nāma* (As 274). I amended the passage according to Be. In PTS was only reported *vipākamanodhātusañtīraṇakiccaṃ sādheti, kiriyaṇamanoviññādhātuvotṭhapanakiccaṃ sādheti*.

⁸³ *ayaṃ ettha dhammatā ti ayaṃ ettha mātu-kucchi-okkamane dhammatā, ayaṃ sabhāvo ayaṃ niyamo ti vuttaṃ hoti* (Sv II 432).

⁸⁴ *niyāmo ca nāma' esa kamma-niyāmo utu-niyāmo bīja-niyāmo citta-niyāmo dhamma-niyāmo ti pañcavidho* (Sv II 432).

The preceding mind and mental factors (*citta-cetasikā dhammā*)⁸⁵ are the condition (*paccaya*), through the condition of support (*upanissaya-paccaya*),⁸⁶ of the following mind and mental factors. So, the coming forth of *sampaṭicchana* etc., immediately follows [the coming forth of] *cakkhu-viññāṇa* etc.; this is the natural order of minds.⁸⁷

In this passage, the emphasis is clearly on the precise order of sequence. Furthermore, the sequence is also emphasised in the exposition of the remaining *niyāmas*. Therefore, the *kamma-niyāma* implies that there is an agreeable kammic result for a good action and a disagreeable kammic result for a bad action;⁸⁸ the *utu-niyāma* is the seasonal change, such as the flowering and fruiting of trees, the blowing of the wind, the strengthening or weakening of the sunshine, a sky with or without rain, the blossoming of the lotus flower during the day, and its closing at night;⁸⁹ the *bīja-niyāma* highlights that just as the fruit of the rice is produced by the rice seed, in the same way the sweet taste is produced by something sweet, etc.;⁹⁰ the *dhamma-niyāma* is a series of events starting from the entry of the [future] Buddha into the mother's womb and ending with the earthquake of the ten-thousand worlds.⁹¹ All these kinds of *niyāma* aim to emphasise the indissoluble sequence of events, which are regular

⁸⁵ According to the PED (s.v. *dhamma*), *cittacetasika* is a term used to denote the four mental *khandhas* (viz. *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, *viññāṇa*).

⁸⁶ The *upanissaya-paccaya* is the ninth *paccaya* of the list of twenty-four *paccayas* in the *Paṭṭhāna*.

⁸⁷ *purimā purimā citta-cetasikā dhammā pacchimānaṃ pacchimānaṃ citta-cetasikānaṃ dhammānaṃ upanissaya-paccayena paccayo ti, evaṃ yad etaṃ cakkhu-viññāṇa' ādīnaṃ anantarā' ādīnaṃ nibbattanaṃ, ayaṃ cittaniyāmo* (Sv II 432).

⁸⁸ *tattha: kusalassa iṭṭha-vipāka-dānaṃ akusalassa aniṭṭha-vipāka-dānaṃ ti, ayaṃ kamma-niyāmo* (Sv II 432).

⁸⁹ *tesu tesu janapadesu tasmim tasmim kāle eka-ppahāren' eva rukkhānaṃ puppha-phala-ggaṇa' ādīni, vātassa vāyanaṃ ātapassa tikkhatā mandatā, devassa vassanaṃ avassanaṃ, padumānaṃ divā vikasanaṃ rattiṃ sammīlanaṃ ti, evaṃ ādi utu-niyāmo* (Sv II 432).

⁹⁰ *yaṃ paṇ' etaṃ sāli-bījato sāli-phalaṃ eva, madhurato madhura-rasaṃ yeva, tittato titta-rasaṃ yeva phalaṃ hoti, ayaṃ bīja-niyāmo* (Sv II 432).

⁹¹ *yā paṇ' eṣā bodhisattānaṃ mātu-kucchiṃ okkamaṇ' ādīsu dasa-sahassi-loka-dhātu-kampaṇ' ādīnaṃ pavatti, ayaṃ dhamma-niyāmo nāma* (Sv II 432). Another explanation of these five *niyāmas* is reported in As 272–274.

and consistent and, therefore, normal and natural.⁹² Indeed, from a seed of a specific plant only one kind of plant can be generated. So, the sequence of mental stages should follow a specific order, and any stage is directly influenced by the preceding one. This sort of discourse recalls a very famous Abhidhamma work, namely the *Paṭṭhāna*. As highlighted by Cousins (1981), the theory of the consciousness process is already embedded within the *Paṭṭhāna* (though some details and technical nomenclature is developed only later). What is worth noting here is that some of the terminology involved in the passages related to the *cittanīyāma* directly recalls the *Paṭṭhāna* terminology and speculative topics. In the aforementioned passage, the phrasing *upanissaya-paccayena paccayo* (Sv II 432) “the condition (*paccaya*), through the condition of support (*upanissaya-paccaya*)” can be found. For the first time in Pāli literature the *Paṭṭhāna* introduces (see Cousins 1981: 39) twenty-four *paccayas*, and the *upanissaya-paccaya* is the ninth *paccaya* of this list. Another reference to the *Paṭṭhāna* speculation is found in another *cittanīyāma* passage:

At the end of *tadārammaṇa*, the *bhavaṅga* proceeds again. When the *bhavaṅga* is interrupted again, starting from the *āvajjana* etc., in this way, the continuity of consciousness in accordance with the causes (*paccaya*) attained proceeds again and again through the natural order of minds (*cittanīyāma*): immediately following (*anantara*) the *bhavaṅga* there is *āvajjana*, immediately following (*anantara*) *āvajjana* there is *dassana*, and so on. This [will carry on] until the exhaustion of the *bhavaṅga* within a single existence.⁹³

This passage seems to deal with another kind of *paccaya*, namely the *anantara-paccaya*, the fourth *paccaya* in the list of twenty-four. However, in this passage the connection with the *anantara-paccaya* of the *Paṭṭhāna* could be questioned since it is not directly established, it is only inferred (though I think it is likely). A more direct reference to the

⁹² These five *niyāmas* are also discussed by Rahula (1974: 183); Crosby (2008: 59–60); Jones (2012).

⁹³ *tad-ārammaṇāvasāne pana puna bhavaṅgam eva pavattati. bhavaṅge vicchinne puna āvajjanādinī ti evaṃ laddhapaccayacittasantānaṃ bhavaṅgānantaraṃ āvajjanaṃ, āvajjanānantaraṃ dassanādinī ti cittanīyamavasen’ eva punappuna tāva pavattati, yāva ekasmiṃ bhavaṅgassa parikkhaya* (Vism 460).

anantara-paccaya is found within another passage in the *Visuddhimagga*, which makes the connection with the *Paṭṭhāna* even clearer:⁹⁴

The condition of proximity (*anantarapaccaya*) is a helping state through the condition of proximity. **The condition of contiguity (*samanantarapaccaya*)** is a helping state through the condition of contiguity. They (i.e. the ancient commentators) explain in detail at great length this pair of causal conditions, but here is the essence [of the meaning]: Because the natural order of minds (*cittaniyama*) beginning thus: “The *manodhātu* is proximate to the *cakkhuvīññāṇa*, the *manovīññāṇadhātu* is proximate to the *manodhātu*, and so on,” it is successful only thanks to each preceding consciousness, not otherwise, therefore a state able to produce the rising of an appropriate consciousness proximate to itself is the condition of proximity. Then it was said so: “**The condition of proximity (*anantarapaccaya*): *cakkhuvīññāṇadhātu* and the states that have an association therewith is the condition through the condition of proximity of the *manodhātu* and the states that have an association therewith**” (Tikap I 2). The condition of proximity (*anantarapaccaya*) is, indeed, the condition of contiguity (*samanantarapaccaya*). The difference here is only a mere matter of letter (*vyañjana*); as in the case of the words *upacaya* and *santati* and the dyads of designation (*adhivacana*) and expression (*nirutti*), there is not a difference in meaning.⁹⁵

In this context the *citta-niyāma* is connected with the sequence as well; in particular it emphasises the relation of proximity which binds one mental state to the previous one, establishing a chain of mental states.

The context of mindfulness and morality and the references to the *citta-niyāma* would prompt the hypothesis that Sv I 194 and parallels⁹⁶ may have retained traces of the original context of formation of the con-

⁹⁴ In Be this passage occurs within a paragraph entitled *Paṭṭhānapaccayakathā*.

⁹⁵ *anantarabhāvena upakāraṇaṃ dhammo anantarapaccayo. samanantarabhāvena upakāraṇaṃ dhammo samanantarapaccayo. idaṇ ca paccayadvayaṃ bahudhā papañcayanti. ayaṃ pan' ettha sāro: – yo hi esa cakkhuvīññāṇānantarā manodhātu, manodhātu-anantarā manovīññāṇadhātu ti-ādicittaniyamo, so yasmā purimapurimacittavasen' eva ijjhati, na aññathā, tasmā attano attano anantaraṃ anurūpassa cittuppādassa uppādanasamatto dhammo anantarapaccayo. ten' ev' āha: – anantarapaccayo ti cakkhuvīññāṇadhātu taṃ sampayuttakā ca dhammā manodhātuyā taṃ-sampayuttakānaṃ ca dhammānaṃ anantarapaccayena paccayo ti ādi [Tikap I 2]. yo anantarapaccayo, sveva samanantarapaccayo. vyañjanamattam eva h' ettha nānaṃ upacayasantatisu viya, adhvicananiruttidukādisu viya ca atthato pana nānaṃ n' atthi (Vism 534).*

⁹⁶ Sv I 194 = Ps I 262; Spk III 191; Vibh-a 356.

consciousness process. If not a direct testimony to it, then it is at least one of the oldest post-canonical sources, if not the oldest.⁹⁷ The verses of Sv I 194 and parallels occur in sections which deal more extensively with the topics of mindfulness and morality. There are some other passages which deal with the consciousness process and whilst predominantly focused on other topics, they do still maintain traces of the connection with mindfulness and morality. Furthermore, the very nature of the consciousness process is clearly connected with mindfulness and morality, since it is able to address some fundamental questions, such as: When is there a fault during a sensory experience? In which part of the process is there culmination of the sensory experience? There is only one answer for all of these questions: during the *javana* stage. The consciousness process is certainly a very useful tool to explain in a mechanistic way what happens during a sensory experience. It is an explanation that does not assume the existence of a self since there is not someone who knows, but knowing is part of a process.⁹⁸ The negation of the self has been a recognisable characteristic of the Buddhist agenda since the very beginning of Buddhism itself. The emphasis on the characteristic to be a process is also highlighted through references to the *citta-niyāma* scattered within the Pāli texts. Not only do the *citta-niyāma*'s references highlight the ineluctable sequence of the process, but also that they are strictly connected with Sv I 194 (and parallels) and the old exposition of the *Paṭṭhāna*, thus allowing us to trace a bulk of post-canonical accounts that are closer to the canonical sources.

8. An attempt to establish lines of development

On the basis of this reconstruction of the consciousness process, I would suggest the existence of two groups of accounts. One group retains some archaic features, while the other group shows a more sophisticated exposition which also more clearly involves the doctrine of momentariness in

⁹⁷ N.B. Cousins, writing about the commentarial verse states that “no doubt this belongs to the period of the old Sinhalese commentaries *if not even earlier*” (1981: 43, emphasis added).

⁹⁸ *abbhantare attā nāma āloketā vā viloketā vā n’atthi* (Sv I 194).

terms of a subdivision of the process in moments which will result in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*'s exposition. According to the sources analysed, I should consider the two extremes of the process of development of the *cittavīthi*, namely the commentarial passage of Sv I 194 (and parallels), and the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*'s account:

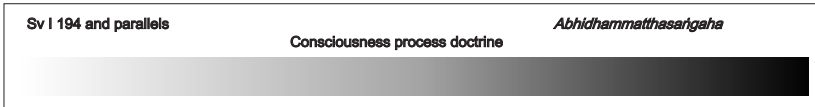


Figure 3. Gradual shifting from the old account to the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* systematisation.

A sharp dividing line is hard to establish, although it may seem that some accounts are closer to the Sv I 194 and parallels (which are, in turn, more closely related with canonical sources), and others to the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (which represents the highest level of development among the sources used in this study). The analysed passages fall into one of the two groups as follows:

Table 6. Two groups of accounts.

Group with archaic features	Group that most integrates the doctrine of momentariness and that will result in the <i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i>
Sv I 194 (verses) = Ps I 262 (verses); Spk III 191 (verses); Vibh-a 356 (verses) It-a 97 Nidd-a I 390–391 Vism 21 Paṭis I 79–83 <i>citta-niyāma</i> passages (viz. As 272; As 274; Sv II 432; Vism 460; Vism 534)	Vism 452–460 Vism 548–551 Vism 617–618 As 261–288 Vibh-a 150–168
Evidence with mixed features	
* <i>Vimuttimaggā</i> Sv I 194–195 (prose) = Ps I 262 (prose); Spk III 191–192 (prose); Vibh-a 256–257 (prose)	

The passages included in the above list share some common features with each other in terms of (1) the number of stages by which the whole consciousness process is composed; (2) the treatment of the *javana* stage; (3) the occurrence of the *tadārammaṇa* stage. This is exemplified in the following chart:

Table 7. Recurring patterns among the accounts.

	Process composed by seven stages	<i>Javana</i> process expressed as a single process, without any mention of the number of <i>javanas</i>	Occurrence of <i>tadārammaṇa</i>
Group with archaic features			
Sv I 194 (verses) = Ps I 262 (verses); Spk III 191 (verses); Vibh-a 356 (verses)	✓	✓	×
It-a 97	✓NE	✓	×
Nidd-a I 390–391	✓NE	✓	×
Vism 21	✓NE	✓	×
Paṭi I 79–83	×	✓	×
<i>(N.B. perhaps not all stages were already developed at that time)</i>			
<i>citta-niyāma</i> passages			
As 272	✓NE	✓ <i>(javanam anubhavati)</i>	×
As 274	✓NE*	✓	×
Sv II 432	–	–	–
Vism 460	–	–	–
Vism 534	–	–	–
Group that most integrates the doctrine of momentariness and that will result in the <i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i>			
Vism 452–460	×	×	✓
Vism 548–551	×	×	✓

Vism 617–618	×	×	✓
As 261–288 (269–270)	×NE (since <i>tadāram- maṇa</i> occurs, there are likely more than seven stages)	×	✓
Vibh-a 150–168 (explanation connected with the <i>patisandhi-</i> and <i>cuti-citta</i> , see esp. pp. 157–158; notably, Vibh-a 155–160 parallels Vism 548–551)	×	×	✓
Evidence with mixed features			
* <i>Vimuttimaggā</i>	✓ (the text talks about seven mental stages, <i>qīxīn</i> 七心)	✓	✓
Sv I 194–195 (prose) = Ps I 262 (prose); Spk III 191–192 (prose); Vibh-a 256–257 (prose)	✓	×	×

* = I followed Be rather than PTS; NE = Not Explicit (but inferred); – = the consciousness process account does not occur.

From the latter table it is possible to extrapolate some recurring patterns among the passages belonging to the same group. The group with archaic features shows that it retains only seven stages of the consciousness process, it understands the *javana* stage without specifying how many *javanas* occur and does not mention the *tadārammaṇa* stage. This lineage also includes the *citta-niyāma* passages, which would highlight the ineluctability of the sequence of stages. Not all *citta-niyāma* passages report the consciousness process account. However, the few that do agree with the leading pattern of the group with archaic features. The other group, however, shows exactly the opposite pattern. The passages in the

category called “Evidence with mixed features” show mixed patterns that do not fit in either of the two groups. This fact could be explained in the following manner: (1) the **Vimuttimagga* passage represents an early attempt of development, so it still retains some archaic features,⁹⁹ introducing, however, the notion of *tadārammaṇa*; (2) the commentarial passages in prose may be, as I have already argued, a comment on the verses and so they may represent a junction point between two different times of development of the theory. The commentarial verses might also provide the answer to a question that, as far as I know, nobody has ever asked: Why are the *javanas* counted up to seven within the Pāli post-canonical texts? The answer may lie, indeed, in the way the prose comments upon the verses within the commentarial passages. In the verses it is only reported that *javanaṃ bhavati sattaman* (“the *javana* comes as seventh”), whereas the prose passage comments upon the verses states *sattakkhattuṃ javanaṃ javati* (“the *javana* impels seven times”). It is possible that the prose passage replaced “*sattama*” with “*sattakkhattu*,” although this hypothesis remains a mere conjecture.

The picture that therefore emerges is that although the consciousness process seems to have a basic kernel, the expositions differ among the texts. The differences may be due to at least two reasons: (1) the different applications of the consciousness process to different topics; or, (2) the consciousness process was itself a debated topic within the Theravāda tradition.

(1) The first point can be exemplified by a passage that not only provides evidence of how a stage within the consciousness process could be modified to fit a purpose, but also provides a model to explain how it was possible that *tadārammaṇa* was introduced into the process as a stage in its own right. This passage aims to explain how the rebirth process occurs, using the model of the consciousness process:

In another’s case, at the time of death, an inferior object, which is the cause of passion, etc., comes into the field of perception within one of the five sense-doors. When [a series of consciousness] ending with the determining consciousness (*votthapana*) arose in due order, five *javanas* [which are only five] because the momentum is enfeebled by the proximity of the death, and

⁹⁹ Such as a mention of seven stages and an older account of different degrees of sensory intensity of the consciousness process.

two registrations (*tadārammaṇa*) arise. Thereafter, having made the objective field of *bhavaṅga* its object, one death consciousness (*cuticitta*) [occurs]. And so far, fifteen mental moments have passed: two *bhavaṅgas*, adverting (*āvajjana*), seeing (*dassana*), receiving (*sampaṭicchana*), investigating (*saṁtīraṇa*), determining (*voṭṭhapaṇa*), five *javanas*, two registrations (*tadārammaṇa*), one death consciousness (*cuticitta*). Then, when there is only this object which has the lifespan of one mental moment remaining, the linking consciousness (*paṭisandhicitta*) arises. This also is the linking (*paṭisandhi*), which has a present object and immediately follows the death (*cuti*) which has a past object.¹⁰⁰

To fully understand what is happening in the process described above, the existence in time of mind and matter and their relationship should be considered. The basic assumption is that a material moment endures for sixteen mental moments.¹⁰¹ Here, the involvement of the doctrine of momentariness is easily recognisable. Sixteen is, therefore, the number of moments of which a complete unit of perception of materiality is composed. The number sixteen in the doctrine of momentariness is a symbol of wholeness applied to the mental process in relation to the duration of materiality (1 material moment = 16 mental moments).¹⁰² Gradually, despite the symbolic value of sixteen, a ratio of 1:17 became established (as is demonstrated by later texts, such as the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*). However, in the passage at stake, a ratio of 1:16 is still current. Hence, the process of death is composed of 2 *bhavaṅgas* + 1

¹⁰⁰ *aparassa maraṇasamaye pañcannaṃ dvārānaṃ aññatarasmiṃ rāgādi-hetubhūtaṃ hīnaṃ ārammaṇaṃ āpāthaṃ āgacchati. tassa yathākkamena uppanne voṭṭhapanāvasāne maraṇassa āsannabhāvena mandībhūtavagattā pañca javanāni dve tadārammaṇāni ca uppajjanti. tato bhavaṅgavisayaṃ ārammaṇaṃ katvā ekaṃ cuticittaṃ. ettavatā ca dve bhavaṅgāni, āvajjanaṃ, dassanaṃ, sampaṭicchanaṃ, saṁtīraṇaṃ, voṭṭhapaṇaṃ, pañca javanāni, dve tadārammaṇāni, ekaṃ cuticittan ti pañcadasa cittakkhaṇā atītā honti. ath' āvasesa-ekacittakkhaṇāyuke tasmim yeva ārammaṇe paṭisandhicittaṃ uppajjati. ayam pi aññatārammaṇāya cutiyā anantarā paccuppannārammaṇā paṭisandhi* (Vism 549; cf. also Vibh-a 157–158).

¹⁰¹ *rūpe dharante yeva hi soḷasavāre bhavaṅgacittaṃ uppajjitvā nirujjhati* (Vism 614), see also *yāva paṇ'uppannaṃ rūpaṃ tiṭṭhati tāva soḷassa cittāni uppajjitvā bhijjanti* (As 60).

¹⁰² The number sixteen, indeed, has a strong symbolic value. For instance, the monetary system of the people in the Indus valley was based on multiples of sixteen and, moreover, the number sixteen was involved in the time-reckoning, just as in the sixteen phases of the moon already established in the Upaniṣadic period (see Kim 1999: 161–165 = 2023: 146–150).

āvajjana + 1 *dassana* + 1 *sampaṭicchana* + 1 *santīraṇa* + 1 *voṭṭhapana* + 5 *jāvanas* + 2 *tadārammaṇas* + 1 *cuticitta* + 1 *paṭisandhicitta* = 16 stages. Here, the *jāvanas* are only five, although in many other places there are seven *jāvanas* described within the consciousness process: “the *jāvana* impels seven times” (*sattakkhattuṃ jāvanam jāvati*; Sv I 195). According to the text, there are only five *jāvanas* because the momentum is enfeebled by the proximity of the death (*maraṇassa āsannabhāvena mandībhūtavegattā pañca jāvanāni*; Vism 549). This is, of course, a very good excuse to remove two *jāvanas* in order to make room within the sixteen-stage process for another two stages, namely *cuticitta* and *paṭisandhicitta*.¹⁰³ This is a good example to illustrate the malleability of the consciousness process and, in particular, the ductility of the *jāvana* stage. Moreover, it is worth noting that *cuticitta* and *paṭisandhicitta* are special epithets given to, respectively, the last and the first *bhavaṅga* of a single existence.¹⁰⁴ However, it might seem that these special *bhavaṅgas* acquired a kind of ontological status over time, just as it happened in the case of *tadārammaṇa*. These “special” *bhavaṅgas* are not only *bhavaṅga* moments, but are also part of the way through which eighty-nine kinds of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) manifest themselves: *yāni paṭisandhi-bhavaṅg’-āvajjana-dassana-savana-ghāyana-sāyana-phusana-sampaṭicchana-santīraṇa-voṭṭhapana-jāvana-tadārammaṇa-cutivasena cuddasahi ākārehi pavattanti* (Vism 457). Looking at the consciousness process in seven stages, it may seem that *bhavaṅga* and *jāvana* are the two extremes of the process: *bhavaṅga* → *āvajjana* → *dassana* → *sampaṭicchana* → *santīraṇa* → *voṭṭhapana* → *jāvana*. However, considering the consciousness process as part of the uninterrupted stream of consciousness, the *bhavaṅga* is, somehow, the start and end point of the process, since any consciousness process is separated by *bhavaṅga*:

¹⁰³ It might be argued that no excuse is needed to remove two moments from *jāvana* stage, since the theory of the death process does not require that the *paṭisandhicitta* has an object which is present and, indeed, there would be nothing wrong with an object that is past. However, in this case, the object is present and comes into the field of perception within one of the five sense-doors. One unit of materiality lasts sixteen mental moments; this ratio is necessary to have the perception of a present object.

¹⁰⁴ “In a single existence, indeed, the last *bhavaṅga* consciousness among all is called ‘death’ (*cuti*) because of its passing away (*cavanatta*)” (*ekasmiṃ hi bhava yaṃ sabbapaccimaṃ bhavaṅgacittam, tam tato cavanattā cutiṃ ti vuccati*; Vism 460).

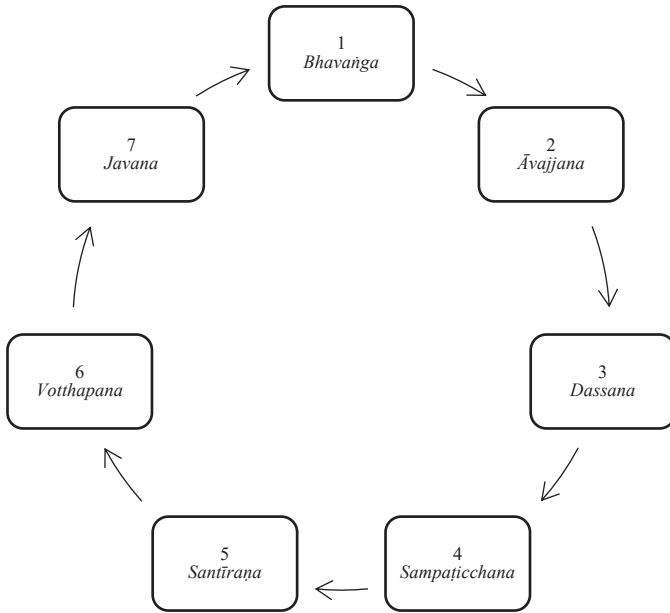


Figure 4. The cyclic stream of consciousness.

The *bhavaṅga* stage is the most inclusive since it was able to accommodate new stages, such as *tadārammaṇa*, *cuticitta*, and *paṭisandhicitta*. We are thus entitled to wonder whether there was a passage from taxonomy to ontology, where some *bhavaṅgas* that acquired specific labels also acquired a special status over time. The *javana* stage has a ductile duration and could be modified on the basis of the specific purposes of the application of the consciousness process. However, despite the various additions or modifications that may occur, it is worth noting that the basic kernel expressed by the seven stages is always valid.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ The only stage that could change in this basic kernel is *dassana* (seeing). The term *dassana* occurs in all expositions, essentially because consciousness processes that occur when a physical object comes into the field of perception of the eye are always taken into account. However, this kind of process can also occur for the other sensory perceptions, such as hearing (*savana*), smelling (*ghāyana*), tasting (*sāyana*), and touching (*phusana*).

(2) Differences in the exposition of the consciousness process might also be due to the fact that there were different views or different theorisations of mental processes among the Theravāda elders centuries before the writing up of the actual Pāli commentaries that occurred around the 5th century AD. This fact would imply a certain fluidity concerning the theorisation of the mental processes in an early phase. Therefore, when the consciousness process appears in connection with the subdivision in moments of the doctrine of momentariness, the temporal construction of the experience would see a specific stage lasting for one or more moments. This, of course, implies that this is a theoretical, and so highly speculative, construction. According to the attempts to convert a moment or an instant (Pāli: *khaṇa*; Sanskrit: *kṣaṇa*) of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣikas into a modern unit of time, one moment is the equivalent of $0.01\bar{3}$ of a second (i.e. $1/75^{\text{th}}$ second).¹⁰⁶ Even if the Theravāda tradition does not provide enough references to calculate the lasting of a moment, it is possible to assume that a moment lasts for an infinitesimal fraction of a second and, therefore, it is not in the range of the ordinary empirical experience. In the words of Karunadasa:

the Abhidhamma doctrine of momentariness shows a shift in emphasis from empiricism to rationalism. It is the result of an attempt to understand the process of change through a process of pure reasoning (2010: 234–235).

However, from a Buddhist point of view, the doctrine of momentariness can be experienced by the yogic perception.¹⁰⁷ Although we may wonder how objective the yogic perception of momentariness was, we should admit that for the majority of Buddhists it probably remained quite a speculative and theoretical topic. And, indeed, on this topic we may find the opinions of many elders in the commentarial literature.¹⁰⁸ These opinions are often reported by the author(s) of the actual Pāli

¹⁰⁶ See von Rospatt (1995: 99, n. 218); W. D. Kim (1999: 75, n. 171 = 2023: 66, n. 173). According to Gethin “there is not Sarvāstivādin consensus on the length of the moment” (1998: 221); in this regard, see the references provided by Conze (1962: 282).

¹⁰⁷ In this regard, see von Rospatt (1995: 196–218).

¹⁰⁸ This is particularly evident in Vism 138; As 267–288; Vibh-a 11; see Welitota (2013: 63–66).

commentaries, who tried to establish the orthodox doctrine. However, we should consider that these theoretical positions, which are now rejected in the actual commentaries, could be the predominant or most influential ones at their time. What I mean is that no matter how wrong or naïve a theoretical view could seem to the Buddhist commentators of the V century onward; we cannot assume this was also the case for the Buddhists of earlier times. The proliferation of theoretical views had understandably affected the final form of the consciousness process doctrine.

9. Conclusion

As highlighted in the present article, it is feasible to believe that the consciousness process doctrine was developed in a context involving the practice of mindfulness and morality. What has not been yet mentioned is that the doctrine of momentariness was also expounded in connection with the practice of mindfulness, the so called *satipaṭṭhāna* in Pāli (Sanskrit: *smṛtyupasthāna*). It is not clear if the doctrine of momentariness was an outside element incorporated in the practice of mindfulness or whether it was a by-product of this practice, but, nevertheless an early connection seems to be assumed by some scholars.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it would seem that, somehow, both the doctrine of momentariness and the doctrine of the consciousness process were developed under the aegis of the practice of mindfulness. Both could be a by-product of a theoretical and/or empirical speculation that comes from a meditative practice.¹¹⁰ This situation sounds to be in accordance with Eviatar Shulman's understanding of early Buddhist philosophy:

¹⁰⁹ In this regard, von Rospatt writes that "from the general tendency of *smṛtyupasthāna* to absorb doctrinal elements from without, it cannot be deduced that this line of development will also have to apply in the case of momentariness. By contrast, it is, as argued above, nevertheless feasible that the development of the theory of momentariness originated with the contemplation of the body's subjection to origination and decay" (1995: 209). Another study is that of Schmithausen (1976).

¹¹⁰ "Empirical" in the sense that the meditative practices can lead the meditator to have some experiences that can become the basis for further speculations. With "theoretical" I mean a similar kind of speculation that either can derive from a real experience, but is intellectually developed far beyond the bare experience, or that is an intellectual development from a second-hand experience.

The philosophical doctrines of Buddhism thus emerged from specific, well-defined meditative perceptions, which were part of a sustained effort to give new shape to (or at times possibly to transcend) experience. The early Buddhist teachings were first of all verbalized reflections on meditative events (2014: x).

Given that these two doctrines might have had a common origin in early Buddhist practices or at least could be connected to each other thanks to the *satipaṭṭhāna*, it is not surprising that they heavily conflated at a certain point in history. Clearly, a certain shadow of momentariness is present in the consciousness process, as the latter implied an atomisation of the process and the mental phenomena were already conceived as arising and ceasing from moment to moment in the Abhidhamma. However, an overemphasis on the subdivision of the stages of the consciousness process into moments is a feature which seems to be a development that occurred over time. Indeed, such a scholastic and meticulous subdivision in moments would not fit an early experiential context, where the sequence of the stage is significant in detecting where a moral fault would occur. It goes without saying that the common origin of the two doctrines has linked them since the very beginning, thus paving the way for future developments.

Furthermore, the early experiential context of the formation of these two doctrines is relevant in appraising the harbingers of the consciousness process doctrine found by Cousins (1981) in the Abhidhamma. In fact, this early connection is also compliant with Maria Heim's recent understanding of the intellectual purpose of the Abhidhamma, which, in her words, aims "to offer a complex set of analytic practices and methods that allow the practitioner to explore the many – perhaps infinite – facets of experience" (2022: 154). Therefore, I assume that the history of the relationship between these two doctrines began with a common, or at least close, origin in an experiential context. Nonetheless, they grew through two discrete ramifications which, at a certain point, gradually converged as the consciousness process gradually begins to be described through the lens of the doctrine of momentariness, in the guise of the number of moments (sixteen or seventeen) of which a complete unit of perception of materiality is composed. The *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and some *Visuddhimagga* passages show us the result of the merger of the

doctrines, whereas other, likely older, commentarial passages reveal that the consciousness process doctrine maintained its independence for some time, escaping evident expositions of the consciousness process through the lens of momentariness. Hence, even if it can be argued that in the early Abhidhammic texts the momentariness of the mental phenomena had already been postulated,¹¹¹ I would highlight how in the old strata of the post-canonical evidence for the doctrine of the consciousness process, the existence in time of the mental phenomena is not the main focus, but rather their order of sequence. Of course, a sharp separation between the doctrine of the consciousness process and the doctrine of momentariness can only depend on how we precisely define the latter. What is clear from the present article is that the early evidence for the doctrine of the consciousness process does not fit some of the current circulating definitions for the doctrine of momentariness as, by way of example, that provided by Buswell and Lopez:

The doctrine of momentariness derives from attempts to elaborate the foundational Buddhist concept of impermanence (ANITYA): viz., how long exactly do causally created events or objects exist before their destruction? (2014: 446).

Neither the duration nor the impermanence of the mental states seems to be the main focus of the consciousness process accounts which present archaic features. The only evident and prominent feature is the sequence of the stages. Indeed, strictly speaking, we only know that some stages in the consciousness process last for more than one moment from post-canonical sources' later strata. Of course, this can be rephrased, to say that even if some stages last for one moment, they can occur more than once in a sequence. However, the latter proposition presupposes coherence, while instead, we can equally understand our evidence hypothesising that the doctrine of the consciousness processes – initially focused only on sequence – was then adapted to a different context, one in which the distribution of phenomena in time was significant. Furthermore, the diachronic analysis of the sources let us notice the gradual addition of *tadārammaṇa* and prompt us to formulate an interpretative hypothesis on

¹¹¹ Gethin (1997: 479), see also W. D. Kim (1999: 148 = 2023: 133).

how the stage of *javana* came to be conceived to last seven moments. The picture that emerges is that of a doctrine that developed over time and underwent readaptations.

In conclusion, I write in the hope that my first attempt to trace the fundamentals of the history of the doctrine of consciousness process and its scholarly reception could be useful to cast new light for further studies, which are certainly needed and hoped for. Topics such as the momentariness and consciousness process are infernally knotty, but as John Milton writes: *long is the way and hard, that out of Hell leads up to light*.

The commentarial description of the consciousness process is highly complex.

(Cousins 1981: 26)

Primary sources and abbreviations

All Pāli citations are from Pali Text Society editions, unless otherwise noted.

A	<i>Aṅguttaranikāya</i>
Abhidh-av	<i>Abhidhammāvatāra</i>
Abhidh-s	<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha</i>
Abhidh-s-mhṭ	<i>Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha-mahāṭīkā</i> (<i>Abhidhammattha-vibhāvinīṭīkā</i>)
As	<i>Atthasālinī</i>
Be	Burmese edition. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka 4.0. Vipassana Research Institute 1995, Version 4.0.0.15.
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇi</i>
PTS	European edition (= Pali Text Society's edition)
It-a	<i>Paramatthadīpanī</i> (<i>Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Kv	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
M	<i>Majjhimanikāya</i>
Moh	<i>Mohavicchedanī</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i> (<i>Aṅguttaranikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Nidd-a I	<i>Saddhammapajjotikā</i> (<i>Mahāniddeśa-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (see Rhys Davids and Stede [1921–1925] 2015)
Ps	<i>Papañcasūdanī</i> (<i>Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>)
S	<i>Samyuttanikāya</i>
Spk	<i>Sāratthappakāsinī</i> (<i>Samyuttanikāya-aṭṭhakathā</i>)

Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī (Dīghanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經 = Digital Edition, http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/ . Database version 2015.
Tikap	<i>Tikapaṭṭhāna</i>
Vibh	<i>Vibhaṅga</i>
Vibh-a	<i>Sammohavinodanī (Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā)</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
Vism-mhṭ	<i>Visuddhimagga-mahāṭikā (Be)</i>

References

- Adikaram, Edward W. 1946. *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*. Colombo: M. D. Gunasena.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2006. “Sampajañña.” In Gunapala P. Malalasekera and W. G. Weeraratne, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*. Vol. 7, fascicle 4. Colombo: The Government of Sri Lanka: 682–683.
- Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2017. “The Luminous Mind in Theravāda and Dharmaguptaka Discourses.” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 13: 10–51.
- Appleton, Naomi. 2010. *Jātaka Stories in Theravāda Buddhism: Narrating the Bodhisatta Path*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Bapat, Purushottam V. 1937. *Vimuttimaggā and Visuddhimaggā: A Comparative Study*. Poona.
- Buswell, Robert E. Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. 2014. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Clark, Chris. 2015. “A Study of the *Apadāna*, Including an Edition and Annotated Translation of the Second, Third and Fourth Chapters.” PhD diss. University of Sydney.
- Collins, Steven. 1982. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conze, Edward. 1962. *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Cousins, Lance S. 1973. “Buddhist *Jhāna*: Its Nature and Attainment According to the Pali Sources.” *Religion* 3 (2): 115–131.
- Cousins, Lance S. 1981. “The Paṭṭhāna and the Development of the Theravādin Abhidhamma.” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 9: 22–46.
- Cousins, Lance S. 2001. “On the Vibhajjavādins: The Mahimsāsaka, Dhammaguttaka, Kassapiya and Tambapaṇṇiya Branches of the Ancient Theriyas.” *Buddhist Studies Review* 18 (2): 131–182.
- Cousins, Lance S. 2012. “The Teachings of the Abhayagiri School.” In Peter Skilling, Jason A. Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham, eds., *How Theravāda is Theravāda? Exploring Buddhist Identities*. Chiang Mai: Silksworm Books: 67–127.

- Crosby, Kate. 2008. "Kamma, Social Collapse or Geophysics? Interpretations of Suffering among Sri Lankan Buddhists in the Immediate Aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami." *Contemporary Buddhism* 9 (1): 53–76.
- De Notariis, Bryan. 2021. "A Study of the Buddhist Path of Liberation: *Manomayakāya*, *Iddhividhā*, and Other *Abhiññās* from the *Sīlakkhandhavagga* to the Commentaries." PhD diss. Università degli Studi di Torino.
- De Notariis, Bryan. Forthcoming. *Extraordinary Capacities in the Buddhist Path of Liberation: A Diachronic Study Based on the Theravāda Sources*. Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Venice University Press.
- Dhammadinnā, Bhikkhunī. 2023. "*Bhavaṅga* in Theravāda Buddhism." In Nirbhay N. Singh, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Other Contemplative Practices*. Cham: Springer: 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-90465-4_89-1.
- Ganeri, Jonardon. 2017. *Attention, Not Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 1992. "The *Mātikās*: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List." In Janet Gyatso, ed., *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press: 149–172.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 1994. "*Bhavaṅga* and Rebirth According to the Abhidhamma." In Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel, eds., *The Buddhist Forum*. Vol. 3. London: SOAS: 11–35.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 1997. Review of *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of this Doctrine up to Vasubandhu*, by Alexander von Rospatt. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 7 (3): 478–480.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 2007. "Introduction." In R. P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin, trans., *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma: (Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha) by Anuruddha. Exposition of the Topics of Abhidhamma: (Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī) by Sumaṅgala, Being a Commentary to Anuruddha's Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma*. Oxford: Pali Text Society: xii–xxi.
- Gethin, Rupert M. L. 2022. "Abhidhamma: Theravāda Thought in Relation to Sarvāstivāda Thought." In Stephen C. Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge: 227–242.
- Giustarini, Giuliano. 2017. "The Interaction of Morality (*sīla*) with Cognitive Factors in the Pāli Nikāyas." *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 18: 43–70.
- Guagni, Marco. 2015. "*Repetita Iuvant*: Le 'vite passate' e l'esercizio alla vita ideale a venire nella letteratura agiografica sul Buddha in lingua pāli." *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale* 51: 59–94.

- Harvey, Peter. 1993. "The Mind-Body Relationship in Pāli Buddhism: A Philosophical Investigation." *Asian Philosophy* 3 (1): 29–41.
- Harvey, Peter. 1995. *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Harvey, Peter. [2010] 2011. "An Analysis of Factors Related to the *kusala/akusala* quality of actions in the Pāli Tradition." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33 (1–2): 175–209.
- Heim, Maria. 2022. "The *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* and *Vibhaṅga*: The Perfectly Awakened Buddha and the First Abhidhammikas." In William Edelglass, Pierre-Julien Harter, and Sara McClintock, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. London: Routledge: 143–159.
- von Hinüber, Oskar. 1996. *A Handbook of Pali Literature*. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hirakawa, Akira. 1997. *A Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary*. Tokyo: The Reiyukai.
- Hwang, Soonil. 2006. *Metaphor and Literalism in Buddhism: The Doctrinal History of Nirvana*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jayatilleke, Kulatissa N. 1963. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Jones, Dhivan T. 2012. "The Five *Niyāmas* as Laws of Nature: An Assessment of Modern Western Interpretations of Theravāda Buddhist Doctrine." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 19: 545–582.
- Kalupahana, David J. 1975. *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*. Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii.
- Kalupahana, David J. 1987. *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Karunadasa, Yakupitiyage. 2010. *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Its Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Reality*. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
- Killingley, Dermot. 2006. "Faculties, Breaths and Orifices: Some Vedic and Sāṃkhya Notions of the Body and Personality." In Anna S. King, ed., *Indian Religions: Renaissance and Renewal*. London: Equinox: 73–108.
- Kim, Kyungrae. 2015. "Observations on Some Technical Terms in the **Vimuttimaggā* and Their English Translations: An Examination of *Jiā* (夾) and *Visayappavatti*." *Buddhist Studies Review* 32 (2): 231–243.
- Kim, Kyungrae. 2016. "Avīci Hell and *wújiān* (無間) in the Cognitive Process: Observations on Some Technical Terms in the *Jié tuō dào lùn* (**Vimuttimaggā*)." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 44 (5): 939–956.
- Kim, Kyungrae. 2018. "Observations on the Term *Bhavaṅga* as Described in the *Jié tuō dào lùn* (**Vimuttimaggā*): Its Proper English Translation and Understanding." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 46 (4): 753–771.
- Kim, [Misan] W. D. 1999. "The Theravādin Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of Its Origins and Development." PhD diss. University of Oxford.

- Kim, Misan W. D. 2023. *The Theravādin Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of Its Origins and Development*. Halle an der Saale: Universitätsverlag Halle-Wittenberg.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu. [1956] 2011. *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Norman, Kenneth R. 1983. *Pali Literature. Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All the Hinayāna Schools of Buddhism*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Nyanatusita, Bhikkhu. 2021. *The Path to Freedom: Vimuttimagga*. 2 vols. Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong.
- Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rahula, Walpola. 1974. "Wrong Notions of *Dhammatā* (*Dharmatā*)." In Lance S. Cousins, Arnold Kunst, and Kenneth R. Norman, eds., *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I. B. Horner*. Dordrecht: Reidel: 181–191.
- Reat, Noble R. 1977. "Karma and Rebirth in the *Upaniṣads* and Buddhism." *Numen* 24 (3): 163–185.
- Rhys Davids, Thomas W. and William Stede. [1921–1925] 2015. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. Bristol: Pali Text Society.
- Ronkin, Noa. 2005. *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Ronkin, Noa. 2010. "From the Buddha's Teaching to the Abhidhamma." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 64 (253 [3]): 341–365.
- von Rospatt, Alexander. 1995. *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness: A Survey of the Origins and Early Phase of this Doctrine up to Vasubandhu*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Sarathchandra, Ediriweera R. 1943. "Bhavaṅga and the Buddhist Psychology of Perception." *University of Ceylon Review* 1 (1): 94–102.
- Sarathchandra, Ediriweera R. 1948. "The Psychology of Perception in Pali Buddhism, with Special Reference to the Theory of Bhavanga." PhD diss. University of London.
- Sarathchandra, Ediriweera R. 1958. *Buddhist Psychology of Perception*. Colombo: Ceylon University Press.
- Schmithausen, Lambert. 1976. "Die vier Konzentrationen der Aufmerksamkeit: Zur geschichtlichen Entwicklung einer spirituellen Praxis des Buddhismus." *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 60: 241–266.
- Shulman, Eviatar. 2014. *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shulman, Eviatar. 2024. "Ethics, Mindfulness, and Consciousness: A Study of Their Relation in Early Buddhism." *Mindfulness* 15: 2415–2427.
- Skorupski, Tadeusz. 2014. "The Buddhist Permutations of Consciousness." *Religions of South Asia* 8 (1): 53–81.

- Smith, Sean M. 2020. "A Pāli Buddhist Philosophy of Sentience: Reflections on *Bhavaṅga Citta*." *Sophia* 59: 457–488.
- Welitota, Ashoka. 2013. "Did Ācariya Buddhaghosa Formulate the Doctrine of Cognitive Process (*cittavīthi*)?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 58 (2): 57–71.
- Wijesekera, Oliver Hector de Alwis. 1976. "Canonical References to *bhavaṅga*." In Oliver Hector de Alwis Wijesekera, ed., *Malalasekera Commemoration Volume*. Colombo: Government Press: 348–352.
- Wijesekera, Oliver Hector de Alwis. 1979. "The Freudian Unconscious and *Bhavaṅga*." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 1 (2): 63–66.
- Willemen, Charles 2023. "Any Chinese Translation of Theravāda Pāli." *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 22: 227–236.
- Wujastyk, Dominik. 2008. "A Body of Knowledge: The Wellcome Ayurvedic Anatomical Man and His Sanskrit Context." *Asian Medicine* 4: 201–248.
- Wynne, Alexander. 2018. "Theriya Networks and the Circulation of the Pali Canon in South Asia: The Vibhajjavādins Reconsidered." *Buddhist Studies Review* 35 (1–2): 245–259.